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Parliament and Women, c.1900-1945

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Parliament and Women, c.1900-1945

Mari Catherine Takayanagi

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PhD

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Parliament and women in the early twentieth century. It does so with particular reference to legislation affecting women's lives and gender equality, the contribution of women to Parliamentary standing committees and select committees, and women staff in the House of Commons and House of Lords.

Four pieces of legislation are studied in detail: the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 that allowed women to become Members of Parliament; the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 that widened employment opportunities for women; the Guardianship of Infants Act 1925 that enabled guardianship of children to be granted equally for men and women; and finally the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise Act) 1928 that gave women the vote on the same terms as men. Together these Acts encompass an important and diverse range of issues. This thesis contends that a full comprehension of its Parliamentary passage enables each Act to be better understood and evaluated in its contemporary context.

The contribution of women MPs to standing committees, which scrutinise legislation, and the participation of women as members, witnesses and staff to select committees of inquiry, is studied here for the first time, filling a significant gap in the historiography. Finally this thesis provides an analysis of the work and lives of women working in Parliament, letting us view Parliament as an environment for women and enabling the House of Commons and House of Lords to be brought into the broader literature of women workers.

This thesis, by considering Parliament in the context of its relationship with women, enables a new understanding of the nature of Parliament in this period, which more accurately reflects its diverse nature. In this way this thesis gives new insights into how Parliament viewed and interacted with women in the early twentieth century.

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List of Abbreviations

CUL	Cambridge University Library
HC Deb	House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, 5th series unless otherwise stated
HL Deb	House of Lords Parliamentary Debates, 5th series unless otherwise stated
ILP	Independent Labour Party
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LSE	London School of Economics
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PA	Parliamentary Archives
SC Deb	Standing Committee Debates
TNA	The National Archives
WL	Women's Library
WFL	Women's Freedom League

Names of MPs and peers: The first time an individual MP or peer is mentioned in the text, their first name, surname, and party is given (either in the text or in a footnote). Thereafter, they may be referred to by surname only. For ease of reference, a complete list of all MPs and peers mentioned in the text, and their parties, is given in Appendix 1.

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on my thesis, and has happened well beyond what I dared hope for. I would therefore like to thank all those who assisted me with projects including 'A Changing House' in 2008, the exhibition and website marking fifty years of the Life Peerages Act 1958 which allowed women to sit in the House of Lords; and the successful inscription of 'Documentary Heritage of the Women's Suffrage Movement' on the UNESCO Memory of the World UK Register in 2011, a joint bid between the Parliamentary Archives and the Women's Library. Baroness Hayman, then Lord Speaker, was very supportive of 'A Changing House' in 2008. Teresa Doherty from the Women's Library collaborated with me on the UNESCO project, and Beverley Cook at the Museum of London was also extremely helpful. Thanks are also due to other staff in Parliament willing to support my efforts to promote women's history inside and outside the building and help me with my research, including staff in the Curator's Office, Web & Intranet Service, Education Service, Parliamentary Outreach, the Information Offices and Libraries of both Houses (especially Elizabeth Hallam-Smith and Shorayne Fairweather in the Lords Library, and Dora Clark and Corie Chambers in the Commons Library), and Mark Collins in the Parliamentary Estates Directorate. A special mention to Melanie Unwin, Deputy Curator of Works of Art, who shares my interest and enthusiasm for promoting the history of women in Parliament. She has always helped me in my projects and I hope my developing expertise has helped in her endeavours, including obtaining a portrait of Lady Rhondda for the Palace of Westminster Collection and establishing the truth about the Falkland Sword incident.

I spent some profitable time researching in archives outside Parliament, and am grateful to staff at The National Archives, Women's Library, Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, British Library, LSE Archives and London Metropolitan Archives. Many thanks especially to Sue Donnelly and Anna Towson at my old stamping ground, the LSE Archives.

In 2004 I spent two days proofreading the doctoral thesis of my friend Adrian Steel, which demonstrated to me that a professional archivist working full-time could also undertake PhD level historical research, and inspired me to undertake a thesis of my own.

Finally I could not have done this without the support of my friends and my family. Thanks especially to Sam, unfailingly supportive of my efforts and ready to prod me into working on my PhD on evenings and weekends when I might not have done; and to my mother, Robby Durrant, who made me the person I am today.

Introduction

This thesis examines the relationship between Parliament and women in the early twentieth century. It does so with particular reference to legislation affecting women's lives and gender equality, the contribution of women to Parliamentary standing committees and select committees, and women staff in the House of Commons and House of Lords.

In 1900 Parliament represented a lobbying target for women's organisations who campaigned for the vote and on other issues affecting women and children. However, little legislation was passed directly affecting women's lives and advancing gender equality. Women could not become Members of Parliament, so could not join debates in the House of Commons chamber or in standing committee. At the other end of the building, women who held peerages in their own right were not entitled to take their seats in the House of Lords. The influence of women on Parliamentary select committee investigatory work was restricted to occasional appearances as witnesses to give evidence. Throughout the Palace of Westminster facilities for women were limited, and Parliamentary officials were exclusively male. Some women lived and worked in Parliament as cooks, cleaners and housekeepers, but there were virtually no women in administrative jobs, let alone in any managerial capacity.

By 1945, much of this had changed. Women could vote on the same terms as men, become MPs and participate in debate in the House of Commons. Women MPs were few in number, and women peers still could not sit in the House of Lords, but a raft of legislation was passed affecting women's lives and gender equality in this period, especially during the decade following 1918. This thesis examines the Parliamentary passage of a selection of such Acts in order to understand their nature and how they came to pass when they did. From 1919 women were also able to participate as full members of Parliamentary standing committees and select committees, scrutinising legislation and investigating subjects. This thesis examines the participation of women as witnesses and co-opted members before and after 1919, and their role as MPs from 1919, determining how significant and distinct a contribution they made. Finally it examines the role of women staff in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Wartime labour shortages enabled women to work as messengers and secretaries in Parliament during the First World War, while the Second World War saw them take on new roles such as Hansard reporters and Committee Clerks; the significance of women performing such jobs is evaluated.

Historians examining the role of women and politics in the early twentieth century have generally concentrated on women's struggle to obtain the vote, and especially the militant suffragette movement.¹ This story almost invariably ends with the partial franchise obtained in the Representation of the People Act 1918, which has been much studied.² Historians who have continued their research into the interwar period have invariably chosen to focus on the women's movement.³ This thesis therefore chooses to take Parliament as its starting point, rather than the women's movement, and to examine some of the many Acts of Parliament that followed in the interwar period which affected women's lives and gender equality. Feminist campaigners constructed lists of such legislation,⁴ as have historians,⁵ but few have actually examined individual Acts in detail.

The relevant legislation affected a wide variety of subjects, some relating to gender equality, others about issues especially affecting women and children on which women's organisations

¹ Examples include: on the Parliamentary picture, Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967). On the organisations, Andrew Rosen, *Rise up, women! the militant campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897-1914* (Hume, 1982); Clare L Eustance, 'Daring to be free': the evolution of women's political identities in the Women's Freedom League 1907-1930 (University of York PhD thesis, 1993). On individuals, Martin Pugh, *The Pankhursts* (London: Allen Lane, 2001). On the anti-suffrage movement, Brian Harrison, *Separate spheres: the opposition to women's suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978). The women's suffrage literature is vast. A bibliography can be found in S S Holton and J Purvis, *Votes for women* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp7-11.

² David Butler, *The electoral system in Britain since 1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); Martin Pugh, *Electoral reform in war and peace, 1906-18* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); S S Holton, *Feminism and democracy: women's suffrage and reform politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Robert Blackburn, 'Laying the Foundations of the Modern Voting System: The Representation of the People Act 1918', pp33-52, in *A Century of Constitutional Reform*, ed, P Norton (Parliamentary History Yearbook Trust, 2001).

³ Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd ed 2000); H L Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s' in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (ed H L Smith, Aldershot: Elgar, 1990); Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and power: the women's movement, 1918-1928* (London: I B Tauris, 1997); Johanna Alberti, 'A symbol and a key: the suffrage movement in Britain, 1918-1928' in *Votes for Women*, eds, Purvis and Holton.

⁴ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The women's victory -- and after: personal reminiscences, 1911-1918* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1920). Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": a short history of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1928 (reprinted 1978)).

⁵ Pugh, *Women and the women's movement*. Pat Thane, 'What difference did the vote make?' in *Women, privilege and power: British politics 1750 to the present*, ed Amanda Vickery (Stanford, Cambridge 2001).

had long campaigned. In this period Acts of Parliament enabled women to become MPs,⁶ widened employment opportunities for women and enabled them to become magistrates and sit on juries,⁷ equalized property inheritance rights,⁸ provided better conditions for pregnant women and children, and improved training for nurses and midwives,⁹ improved affiliation, separation and maintenance orders and reformed marriage and divorce law, including equalising the right to sue for divorce for women,¹⁰ removed the automatic death penalty for infanticide and created the offence of child destruction,¹¹ raised the age of consent and the age of marriage to 16,¹² introduced equal guardianship,¹³ regulated sale of drink to children, allowed women to sit in courts of arbitration, introduced widows and orphans pensions, reformed legitimacy law¹⁴ and adoption law,¹⁵ and equalised the franchise.¹⁶

⁶ *Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act* c.47 1918, studied in Chapter 1.

⁷ *Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act* c.71 1919, studied in Chapter 2.

⁸ *Intestate Husband's Estate (Scotland) Act*, c.9 1919; *Law of Property Act*, c. 16 1922; *Law of Property Act*, c.20 1925; *Law Reform (Married Women and Tortfeasors) Act* c.30 1935; *Inheritance (Family Provision) Act* c.45 1938.

⁹ *Maternity and Child Welfare Act* c.29 1918; *Midwives Act* c.43 1918; *Nurses Registration Act* c.94 1919.

¹⁰ *Married Women (Maintenance) Act* c.63 1920; *Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Act*, c. 51 1925; *Deceased Brother's Widow's Marriage Act*, c.24 1921; *Administration of Justice Act*, c.81 1920; *Matrimonial Causes Act* c.19 1923; *Matrimonial Causes Act* c.57 1937. See: Cordelia Ann Moyse, 'Reform of Marriage and Divorce Law in England and Wales 1909-1937' (University of Cambridge, PhD, 1996).

¹¹ *Infanticide Act* c.18 1922; *Infanticide Act* c.36 1938. See: Daniel J R Grey, 'Women's Policy Networks and the Infanticide Act 1922' pp441-463 in *Twentieth Century British History* 21(4): 2010. Also, Daniel J R Grey, 'Discourses of infanticide in England, 1880-1922', (Roehampton University, PhD, 2008). Child destruction was the killing of an unborn child capable of being born alive. *Infant Life (Preservation) Act* c.34 1929.

¹² *Criminal Law Amendment Act* c.56 1922. See Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies* (Spinefex Press, 1997). *Age of Marriage Act*, c.36 1929. See Melinda Alison Haunton, 'Conservatism and society: aspects of government policy 1924-1929', Royal Holloway, University of London, PhD thesis (2002). Haunton also considers other legislation passed by the 1924-1929 government affecting women and family life.

¹³ *Guardianship of Infants Act* c.45 1925, studied in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ *Intoxicating Liquor (Sales to Persons under Eighteen) Act*, c.28 1923; *Industrial Courts Act*, c.69 1919; *Widows', Orphans' and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act*, c.70 1925; *Bastardy Act*, c.23 1923; *Legitimacy Act*, c.60 1926.

Chapters 1 to 4 of this thesis examine a selection of four these Acts. These Acts were selected as in each case their Parliamentary passage had not been previously researched in detail, they had a range of source material, and together they encompassed an interesting and diverse range of issues including gender equality, women as MPs, women working in professions, the criminal justice system, the rights of mothers and the right to vote.¹⁷ These four are the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 that allowed women to become Members of Parliament; the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 that widened employment opportunities for women; the Equal Guardianship Act 1925 that enabled guardianship of children to be granted equally for men and women; and the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise Act) 1928 that gave women the vote on the same terms as men.

Proposals for new laws (bills) go through a procedure in both Houses of Parliament before becoming law. These include a formal first reading; a second reading to debate the principles of the bill; a committee stage where fine detail is considered (usually a standing committee in the House of Commons and a committee of the whole House in the Lords); a report stage to consider further amendments; a third reading, where no further amendments can be made, to approve the bill; and then the whole procedure is repeated in the other House. Once agreement is reached, Royal Assent is granted and the bill becomes an Act of Parliament.¹⁸ This thesis contends that a full comprehension of its Parliamentary passage enables each Act to be better understood and evaluated in its contemporary context. The background to the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 explains how it came into law as early as 1918, and why women were allowed to become MPs from the age of 21 even though they could not vote at that age; analysis of the much-maligned Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 sheds light on the intentions of those involved and the difficulties faced along the way, and enables a new appreciation of its achievements; the long gestation of the Equal Guardianship Act 1925 shows the importance of individual MPs and peers in building consensus through successive private members' bills and a joint select committee; and the even longer path to Equal Franchise in 1928 shows how opposition in government meant it took ten years to obtain.

¹⁵ *Adoption of Children Act*, c.29 1926; *Adoption of Children (Regulation) Act*, c. 27 1939. See Jenny Keating, *A child for keeps: the history of adoption in England, 1918-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁶ *Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act* c.12 1928, studied in Chapter 4.

¹⁷ Space restricted the study to four.

¹⁸ See <<http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/passage-bill/>> accessed 9 July 2012.

Legislation represents only one area of activity in Parliament, so chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis study the role of women in Parliament in a different and hitherto unexplored area: committee work. Historians studying women MPs in this period have concentrated either on biographical studies,¹⁹ or given particular focus on their contribution to debates in the House of Commons chamber.²⁰ This thesis therefore opts to study an area barely referenced in the literature; their contribution to the work of Parliamentary committees. Chapter 5 examines their contribution to standing committees, which scrutinise legislation, and chapter 6 examines their role in select committees of inquiry. Committee work in this period is rarely studied, and never in relation to the role of women. As a result their nature as Parliamentary bodies is poorly understood.²¹

Finally, although there have been a number of studies of female workforces in this period,²² Parliament as an employer of women has never been examined.²³ Work has been done on the

¹⁹ For example: Anthony Masters, *Nancy Astor: a life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981). Betty D Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson 1891-1947* (London: Croom Helm, 1982). Brian Harrison, *Prudent revolutionaries: portraits of British feminists between the wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). S J Hetherington, *Katharine Atholl, 1874-1960: against the tide* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989). Mervyn Jones, *A radical life: the biography of Megan Lloyd George, 1902-1966* (London: Hutchinson, 1991). Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: a life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the politics of conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Brian Harrison, 'Women in a men's house: the women MPs, 1919-1945', *Historical Journal* 29(3) 1986. Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: an account of women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967). Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House*, (London: Athlone Press, 1979).

²¹ Committees are considered in this period in W Ivor Jennings, *Parliament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), pp264-279. Otherwise, studies of Parliamentary committees tend to focus on either earlier periods, e.g. T G B Cocks and Strathearn Gordon, *A people's conscience: a survey of six parliamentary enquiries held between 1729 and 1837* (Constable, 1952); or later periods, e.g. Nevil Johnson, 'Select Committees and Administration' in *The House of Commons in the Twentieth Century: essays by members of the Study of Parliament Group* (ed, S A Walkland, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

²² For example: Gregory Anderson, ed, *The White-Blouse revolution: female office workers since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). Meta Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems for the employment of women in the British civil service, 1919-1939' pp901-924 in *Historical Journal* 27(4) 1984. Alison Oram, *Women teachers and feminist politics, 1900-39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place; Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Helen Glew, 'Women's Employment in the General Post Office, 1914-1939' (London, Institute of Historical Research, PhD, 2010). Catherine Murphy, '"On an equal footing with men?" Women and work at the BBC, 1923-1939', (Goldsmiths College, University of London, PhD, 2011).

²³ There is no history of staffing in Parliament in this period to compare with O C Williams, *The clerical organization of the House of Commons, 1661-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954). Various biographical lists of senior Parliamentary staff (Clerks) have been published, but the employment of

gendered nature of Parliamentary spaces for visitors such as the Ladies' Gallery,²⁴ and the culture and prejudice encountered by women MPs²⁵ and later by women peers²⁶ on their arrival, but not on the space occupied and the attitudes encountered by women who lived and worked in Parliament for centuries beforehand. This is rectified by chapter 7, which identifies women workers previously hidden from history including housekeepers, kitchen staff, secretaries, reporters, Clerks and others. The impact of individual women employees in departments such as the House of Commons Committee Office and the House of Lords Accounting and Copying Department, is demonstrated. As well as broadening our understanding of Parliament as an environment for women, it adds a new dimension to the effect of the First and Second World War on Parliament, and enables the House of Commons and House of Lords to be brought into the wider literature on women workers.

This thesis uses Parliamentary sources including Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), select committee reports and standing committee debates extensively, together with archival sources in the Parliamentary Archives, The National Archives, the Women's Library and elsewhere. This thesis cannot and does not claim to speak comprehensively for all women; the sources and the nature of Parliamentary procedures and processes mean that educated, middle-class women are more likely to feature both as individuals and in groups in this research, although not exclusively. However chapter 7 on women staff goes some way to broadening the demographic studied, as it considers working-class women in roles such as cooks, cleaners and housekeepers in detail. Also, by focussing on women it is in no way contended that women were the only group treated unequally or affected by change in Parliament during this period. The early twentieth century saw a marked increase in

women in these is not acknowledged until the late 1960s. W R McKay, *Clerks in the House of Commons, 1363-1989: a biographical list* (HMSO, 1989). J C Sainty, *The Parliament Office in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: biographical notes on clerks in the House of Lords, 1800 to 1939* (House of Lords, 1990).

²⁴ Clare L Eustance, 'Protests From Behind the Grille: Gender and the Transformation of Parliament, 1867–1918', pp107-126 in *Parliamentary History* 16(1) 1997. Nirmal Puwar, 'The Archi-texture of Parliament: Flaneur as Method in Westminster' pp298-312 in *Journal of Legislative Studies* 16(3) 2010.

²⁵ Brookes, *Women at Westminster*. Vallance, *Women in the House*. Harrison, 'Women in a men's house'. Biographies of women MPs also cover this angle.

²⁶ Duncan Sutherland, 'Peeresses, parliament, and prejudice: the admission of women to the House of Lords, 1900-1963' (University of Cambridge PhD, 2000). Mari Takayanagi, 'A changing house: the Life Peerages Act 1958', pp380-392 in *Parliamentary History* 27(3) 2008.

representation for working-class men and women, for example, as the Labour party replaced the Liberals as the main opposition to the Conservatives.

The approach taken in this thesis is to combine the usually unconnected disciplines of women's history and Parliamentary history. Women's history of this period has preferred to take women's organisations and individuals as a starting point, with biographical studies and evaluations of the women's movement; Parliamentary history has barely studied this period at all, let alone with regard to its relationship with women.²⁷ By contrast the starting point of this thesis is Parliament as an institution, with full consideration of all its sometimes arcane procedures and processes. This thesis moves away from traditional narrow 'high' or 'elite' political history in which political institutions were studied in isolation from social history subjects such as gender, culture and sexuality, and towards what Stephen Fielding has identified as a 'new' political history, which engages with such subjects 'without losing sight of the power of politics to shape society.' This approach to political history, focusing on 'the interactive relationship between politics and the people' enables new interpretations of traditional topics and more accurately reflects the true and diverse nature of politics.²⁸ This thesis, by considering Parliament in the context of its relationship with women, enables a better understanding of the nature of Parliament in this period. Methods such as lobbying and campaigning can be seen from the inside rather than the outside, and the competing pressures better understood. The fine detail of legislation affecting women, which often seemed inadequate to lobbying organisations and therefore also disappointing to the historians studying them, can be understood and interpreted in its Parliamentary context properly for the first time. Bodies such as select committees are evaluated as Parliamentary institutions with full comprehension of their nature and role. Parliament can be comprehended not only as a place for MPs and peers to debate and legislate, but also as a place of work and a place to live for women. In this way this thesis gives new insights into how Parliament viewed and interacted with women in the early twentieth century.

²⁷ There are surprisingly few academic studies of Parliament in the early 20th century period: one example is Jennings, *Parliament*. Traditionally, Parliamentary historians have taken 1832 as an end date. Although the History of Parliament Trust is currently researching the period 1832-1868 (with a view to eventually taking it up to 1945) there is no comprehensive history of the Commons or Lords in the early twentieth century.

²⁸ Stephen Fielding, *Political History* (Institute of Historical Research, 2008).
http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/political_history.html accessed 19 Mar 2012.

Chapter One

How women came to be Members of Parliament: The passage of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918

In late 1918 an Act of Parliament was passed which enabled women to become Members of the House of Commons. It was very short, stating in full:

A woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage for being elected to or sitting or voting as a Member of the Commons House of Parliament.¹

This Act came in soon after the successful passage of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave some women over the age of 30 the vote for the first time. Unlike its more famous cousin, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act barely gets more than a passing mention by historians. Some historians appear to assume that the Representation of the People Act also allowed women to become MPs; others that it came a year later with the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act.² Historians who do refer to it usually remark on it briefly as an appendix to getting the vote, for example Martin Pugh: 'After [Parliament granting the vote]...came a greater surprise; in October 1918 MPs conceded, almost without debate, the right of women to sit in the House of Commons, preferring to settle the issue rather than leaving it to Returning Officers to decide whether to accept women's nominations as valid.'³ Or it is mentioned as a prelude to the candidature of the first women candidates, explaining that the timing of the Act meant women had only a very short time to get their nominations in before the 1918 general election.⁴ The fullest account of the passage of the Act appears in Pamela Brookes' *Women at Westminster*,⁵ but this is descriptive rather than analytical, a few pages of scene-setting for a book on the women MPs who followed.

¹ *Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918*, c. 47.

² 'The 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act allowed women to take up any civil or judicial post that was open to men – like MPs, barristers or magistrates.' Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One hand tied behind us: the rise of the women's suffrage movement* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000), p272.

³ Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd ed 2000), p43.

⁴ Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and power: the women's movement, 1918-1928* (London: I B Tauris, 1997), p110. Law does not analyse the passage of this Act at all.

⁵ Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: an account of women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967), pp3-6.

Despite the symbolic and actual significance of allowing women to become members of the House of Commons, an analysis of the passage of the Act itself appears to be lacking. This is important because, unlike the Representation of the People Act 1918, there was no history of women's groups lobbying for it, no Speaker's Conference, no unsuccessful private members bills. The possibility of future women MPs did not play a major part in the debates on the Representation of the People Bill.⁶ Occasionally during the long campaign for votes for women, the spectre of female MPs was raised by anti-suffragists as part of a 'thin end of the wedge' argument; for example by Edward Bouverie who mused in 1873 what would happen if a 'lovely spinster' in Parliament had a proposal of marriage on the eve of a great division; 'Why the fate of a Government might depend on the occurrence.'⁷ An anti-suffrage pamphlet tellingly titled *The Woman MP: a peril to women and the country* was published in 1909, arguing that there would be 'a new and inferior type of Parliamentary candidate' appealing to feelings rather than reason. It stated, 'Men cannot work side by side with those who will not adopt men's codes of honour, truth and decency in public life and work.'⁸ A satirical skit from 1912 re-wrote Aristophanes' *The Assemblywomen* as a play where 'Mrs Pankagoras' and others dressed up as men with beards and invaded the assembly at Athens in 393 BC. They declared all property and possessions now belonged to the state, and there would be equal opportunities in love.⁹

As a result of such arguments, suffragists anxious not to endanger their cause did not pursue the idea of women MPs, indeed they sometimes argued that the grant of the vote would not include eligibility to sit in Parliament. For example, Emily Davies in a letter to *The Times* in 1907: 'Many of the advocates of women's suffrage are decidedly opposed [to women MPs]... the clergy of the Church of England are ineligible for membership of Parliament, though they have the same right of voting as other citizens... the question of women in Parliament is not

⁶ It was mentioned occasionally. 'There is probably not much doubt about this, that when women get the vote they will come into this House. I should certainly like to have the young ones here as well as the old. (Laughter).' House of Commons Parliamentary Debates [thereafter HC Deb], 20 Jun 1917 vol 94 c1832, Rowland Hunt (National Party).

⁷ HC Deb (3rd series) 30 Apr 1873 vol 215 c1219, E P Bouverie (Conservative).

⁸ Women's Library [thereafter WL] pamphlet. A C Gronno, 'The woman MP: a peril to women and the country' (Manchester: For the Manchester Branch of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, 1909), pp33-35. Gronno lived through the war to see the advent of the woman MP.

⁹ W H Mallock, 'Women in Parliament' (1912) in Lucy Delap and Ann Heilmann, eds, *Anti-feminism in Edwardian literature* (London: Thoemmes Continuum, vol 3, 2006).

practical politics.'¹⁰ Despite this it is rarely asked – if it was so surprising an event, so little lobbied for, why did it happen, and why so soon after women got the vote? An examination of the Parliamentary debates may shed some light on this.

Resolution in the House

The act originated from a resolution in the House of Commons introduced by Herbert Samuel on 23 October 1918, which read:

That in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that a Bill be passed forthwith making women eligible as Members of Parliament.¹¹

The Parliamentary session was to end less than a month later, on 21 November 1918; a very tight timescale for a bill to pass. Herbert Samuel (later Viscount Samuel) was Liberal MP for Cleveland and in 1918 he was a backbencher, having been a government minister in various positions between 1906-1916. Earlier in 1918 he had made a speech to the London School of Economics in favour of women in Parliament.¹² In his *Memoirs* Samuel explained how although he had always been generally in favour of women's emancipation ('John Stuart Mill had convinced me about that') he had been alienated by the actions of suffragettes, despite having a wife who was an enthusiastic suffragist. Looking back, Samuel regretted not having actively supported women's suffrage earlier and remarked 'Perhaps it was a feeling that I ought to make some amends that led me to take the initiative in Parliament in promoting legislation to make women eligible to the House of Commons.'¹³ The war had been the main factor in Samuel changing his mind; he had previously doubted the degree of women's public interest, but the war had 'made women familiar with many aspects of public life.'¹⁴ Such arguments, that this was the 'reward' for women's war work, had been made frequently during the suffrage debates of 1917-18 and were repeated by those discussing whether

¹⁰ *The Times*, 4 Feb 1907.

¹¹ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c813, Herbert Samuel (Liberal).

¹² *The Vote*, 5 Apr 1918.

¹³ Herbert Louis Samuel, *Memoirs* (London: The Cresset Press, 1945), pp129-130.

¹⁴ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c814, Herbert Samuel.

women should become MPs. Newton Moore said, 'The magnificent work already performed by women during the War... is a complete justification.'¹⁵

Samuel's resolution was neither supported nor opposed by the Government. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Andrew Bonar Law, had previously told Parliament the opinion of the Law Officers was that women were not entitled to sit in Parliament.¹⁶ The War Cabinet's discussions on 14 October 1918 included the eligibility of women to sit in the House of Commons as the last item on its agenda for the day, but they decided 'to leave the question to the decision of the House of Commons.'¹⁷ It was Samuel who took the question to the House.

Samuel's resolution was called 'One of the most revolutionary proposals that has ever been put before the House.'¹⁸ His first point was that this was a logical consequence of the earlier passage of the Representation of the People Act. 'You cannot say that 6,000,000 women shall be voters but that not one shall ever be a legislator... we have given up the old narrow doctrine that woman's sphere was the home.'¹⁹ His opponents countered with 'wait and see'; Sir Frederick Banbury, notorious opponent of all women's issues, warned that 'No one knows... what the result of this great change [the Representation of the People Act] may be... I venture to say that we should not proceed further.'²⁰ Basil Peto argued if they had realised that extending the franchise would lead to women MPs, 'I think the right to vote would never have been granted to women during the present Parliament'. Henry Craik said current candidates would be militant suffragettes not representative of women generally, and a delay would allow other women 'of wisdom, of moderation, of calmness', to come forward. With the general election fast approaching, it was argued that the House of Commons was now a moribund House which had no business passing such an important piece of legislation.²¹ In the House of Lords subsequently, several peers argued that such a bill should not come so late in the

¹⁵ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c844, Newton Moore (Conservative). Moore had been elected to the House of Commons less than a month earlier. He was previously Premier of Western Australia, which gave women the vote in 1899, although they could not stand as candidates until 1920.

¹⁶ HC Deb 8 Aug 1918 vol 109 cc1534-5, Andrew Bonar Law (Conservative). He added, 'I have seen their decision, and, as usual, they were wise enough not to give their reasons.'

¹⁷ The National Archives [thereafter TNA], CAB 23/8, p.30.

¹⁸ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110, c833, Basil Peto (Conservative).

¹⁹ Ibid, c814, Herbert Samuel.

²⁰ Ibid, c823, Frederick Banbury (Conservative).

²¹ Ibid, cc830-2, Peto; c837, Sir Henry Craik (Conservative); c823, Banbury.

Parliamentary session: 'This Bill seems to be an instance of the folly of scrambling legislation through Parliament at a period when the session is coming to a close.' Lord Balfour of Burleigh called it 'a perfect outrage on Parliamentary procedure.'²²

Lord Robert Cecil argued against this, saying that Parliament could not neglect its constitutional duty by refusing to give an opinion;²³ 'If we think it is a good thing, then the sooner it is done the better; and if we think it is a bad thing, then it ought not to be done at all.'²⁴ Samuel tried to mitigate fear among some MPs by saying that only exceptional women would get in, and 'it is rather more probable that too few will be elected to this House than too many.'²⁵ This argument was ridiculed by J D Rees; 'Once you abolish the sex bar you cannot, and should not, hope that there will be few women Members in this House.'²⁶

The responsibility of returning officers

Perhaps the most immediate practical argument put forward about the need for action was that if there was no bill, the decision about women candidates would be the personal responsibility of individual returning officers at the forthcoming general election. The exclusion of women was a matter of common law, not statute law. 'It will be made a test question in every constituency' so should be dealt with first.²⁷ Samuel was quite right to point out this practical implication which was already causing comment. Despite the argument of some MPs that probably 90% of women 'have not the slightest desire to enter this House or to be ruled and guided by members of their sex in this House'²⁸ a number of women were already lining up to stand. The first woman candidate was Nina Boyle from the Women's Freedom League, who put herself forward for the constituency of Keighley by-election in April 1918 as a test case. If her nomination was refused she was prepared to contest the decision in the courts.²⁹

²² House of Lords Parliamentary Debates [thereafter HL Deb] 12 Nov 1918 vol 31 c1240, Viscount Chaplin (Conservative); c1242, Lord Balfour of Burleigh (Conservative).

²³ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c826, Lord Robert Cecil (Conservative).

²⁴ Ibid, c825, Lord Robert Cecil.

²⁵ Ibid, c814, c818 and c821, Herbert Samuel.

²⁶ Ibid, c846, John David Rees (Conservative).

²⁷ Ibid, c819, Herbert Samuel.

²⁸ Ibid, c829, Peto; c1870, Major Henry Terrell (Conservative).

²⁹ *The Times*, 4 Apr 1918. Nina Boyle was one of the founders of the Women Police Volunteers during the war: 'as there are now... women constables sworn in with powers of arrest, and women in many

This was the first time in Great Britain that the name of a woman appeared on a nomination paper.³⁰ Boyle made it clear that she was doing this as a test and that the result of the election was not important as the successful candidate would have to stand again shortly in the general election.³¹

The candidacy of Nina Boyle is also significant in that it demonstrates that at least one of the major feminist organisations had recognised the importance of establishing the legitimacy of women Parliamentary candidates very soon after the limited franchise had been won. The Women's Freedom League (WFL) took great interest in both civil and criminal legal matters,³² and had discussed the issue of running or supporting women Parliamentary candidates in detail as early as their conference on 23-24 February 1918, just a few weeks after the passage of the Representation of the People Act on 6 February. Although the issue of whether to support only independent women candidates or also party political women was contentious, and lack of money a major barrier, the WFL conference was in agreement that women should stand for Parliament. Several delegates suggested Parliament might choose to bar even successful women candidates; Boyle recalled Charles Bradlaugh, repeatedly returned by constituents but not allowed to take his seat in the House of Commons.³³ Ray Strachey wrote in 1928 regarding the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, 'The passing of this Act came as a surprise to the suffragists, who had expected a long struggle on the subject',³⁴ yet for the WFL activists it cannot have been such a surprise.³⁵ The National Union of Women's Suffrage

other responsible positions, she did not think it right that lack of precedent should be allowed to debar women', *Daily Express* 2 Apr 1918, quoted in Joyce Marlow, *Votes for women: the Virago book of suffragettes* (London: Virago, 2001), p251.

³⁰ Cicely Hamilton, *Nina Boyle* (London: Marie Lawson for the Nina Boyle Memorial Committee [1944]).

³¹ *The Vote*, 5 Apr 1918.

³² The WFL outlived the suffrage struggle and remained in existence until 1961. It took a special interest in criminal justice, including monitoring women in courts and police work. Anne Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice: A Historical Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp20-21.

³³ Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), MP for Northampton, was an atheist who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance required of MPs in 1880. He was re-elected four times before being allowed to take his seat in 1886. Edward Royle, 'Bradlaugh, Charles (1833-1891)', *ODNB*.

³⁴ Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": a short history of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1928 (reprinted 1978)), p368.

³⁵ Edith How-Martyn wrote that having obtained the vote, 'the forward spirits among suffragists at once began to talk of the possibility of getting women MPs.' WL Pamphlet, Edith How-Martyn, 'The need for women members of parliament' (London: Women's Freedom League, [1920]), p1.

Societies (NUWSS) was altogether more cautious, their Executive Committee minutes for 11 April 1918 stating that 'Mrs Strachey had advised the secretary of the Keighley society to take no action until it was clear whether Miss Boyle would be allowed to stand.'³⁶ Subsequently the NUWSS, now renamed the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), also threw itself into campaigning for women MPs.³⁷

The Times recorded that 'Miss Boyle claimed a moral triumph' after her nomination was refused only on a technicality; she presented two nomination papers, but one was signed by someone who was not an elector and the other by someone outside the constituency. The Deputy Returning Officer would have accepted her nomination otherwise.³⁸ Having succeeded in establishing a principle and setting a precedent, Nina Boyle did not try to stand again.³⁹ In May the ILP announced they had added Margaret Bondfield and Mrs Snowden to their list of Parliamentary candidates, and Labour adopted Mary Macarthur at Stourbridge, making her the first woman to be officially selected by a political party.⁴⁰ These early candidatures are sometimes overlooked by historians keen to point out that women candidates only had 23 days to prepare for election after the passage of this Act,⁴¹ apparently not realising that at least some of them had been preparing beforehand. Even women who were only formally selected by political parties after the Act was passed may have been approached many months before; Violet Markham was asked by Liberals to stand in Mansfield as early as 28 February.⁴²

By the time of Samuel's resolution in the House of Commons a further three women were intending to stand as Independents.⁴³ Perhaps aware of this situation, Major Chapple predicted that parties would not select women and they would stand as additional candidates

³⁶ WL, 2NWS/A/1/10.

³⁷ For example on 10 Oct 1918 a letter on the need for women MPs was issued to the general press. WL, 2/NWS/A/7/1. Literary and Press sub-committee, press report.

³⁸ *The Times*, 20 Apr 1918.

³⁹ Nina had undertaken her candidacy with 'very little money ' for expenses, and had funds been available she probably would have tried again. Hamilton, *Nina Boyle*.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 13 May 1918.

⁴¹ E.g. Law, *Suffrage and power*, p116.

⁴² Violet Markham, *Duty and citizenship: the correspondence and political papers of Violet Markham 1896-1953*, ed Helen Jones (London: Historian's Press, 1994), p94. Markham to J A Spender, 28 Feb 1918. She agreed to stand in November (p100, Markham to Cyril Newton Thompson, 14 Nov 1918).

⁴³ *The Times*, 19 Oct 1919. Margaret Milne Farquharson, Eunice Murray and Edith How Martyn.

which would lead to 'evils which arise from minority representation.'⁴⁴ Chapple was correct in the short term in that a large number of women would stand as Independents in the 1918 General Election, although incorrect that they would succeed and this would lead to minority representation. Women would find it as hard to succeed as candidates outside political parties as men, if not harder.⁴⁵

Women and select committee work

Samuel also argued that the House of Commons needed to be more representative. He drew a parallel with the Labour MPs: 'this House gains greatly by the presence here of direct representatives of labour... it is the same with respect to the distinctive standpoint of women.'⁴⁶ Indeed the Labour Party were supportive of Samuel's resolution, although they had previously refused to put forward a bill on women MPs.⁴⁷ Labour leader William Adamson spoke of women's role in industry, as well as the need to have them in the House to put their point of view on pensions, wages, housing, demobilisation and care of children; women would bring 'the human touch which has hitherto been absent.'⁴⁸ Samuel pointed out in the past others had been excluded, by qualifications of property and also groups such as Catholics, Jews, Quakers and atheists. 'All these barriers have been swept away... and but one remains, and that is the barrier of sex.'⁴⁹ Samuel of course had a very deep interest in Jewish affairs and would later serve as High Commissioner to Palestine.

In particular it was argued by several MPs that women would have a valuable contribution to make to select committee work. Samuel cited the precedent set during the war of outsiders being appointed to select committees, including the experience of women on the 'Luxury

⁴⁴ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1884, Major William Chapple (Liberal). Chapple was previously a member of the New Zealand House of Representatives.

⁴⁵ Seventeen women stood at the General Election in 1918, of whom one was Conservative, four Labour, four Liberal, two Sinn Fein and six Independents. Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, p6. To date there has only ever been one Independent woman MP elected, Eleanor Rathbone between 1929 and 1946 (other women MPs, such as Clare Short, have become Independents after being elected).

⁴⁶ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c815, Herbert Samuel.

⁴⁷ *The Vote*, 2 Aug 1918.

⁴⁸ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c850, William Adamson (1863-1936) (Labour).

⁴⁹ Ibid, Herbert Samuel. Non-conformists were allowed to become MPs from 1828, Catholics from 1829, Jews from 1858 and atheists from 1886.

Committee' sub-committee.⁵⁰ During second reading Sir Willoughby Dickinson said 'At this very moment there is a Committee sitting upstairs which I believe would be strengthened by the admission of women.' Dickinson was himself on the Joint Committee on Criminal Law (Amendment) about which a regulation had been referred to a special committee 'on which the Home Secretary has purposely invited ladies to serve.'⁵¹ MPs generally argued that there was a need for the point of view of women in issues such as housing, health, education and child welfare. Women's organisations had long used the same arguments for political reasons although the idea that women MPs would have different interests had in fact been used against them in the past –the anti-suffrage pamphlet from 1909 *The Woman MP – A Peril to Women and the Country* said women MPs would 'increase the number of capricious, emotional and meddlesome laws': for example, a law requiring children of a certain age to be in bed by a certain time.⁵² Despite having repudiated the separate sphere ideology, Samuel unconsciously fell back on the terminology: 'In future our politics are likely to centre more and more around the home.'⁵³

Women and local government

Another argument made in Parliament was that women had proved their worth on local government bodies. Indeed, a woman was currently occupying the important office of deputy chairman of the London County Council.⁵⁴ Samuel mentioned he had been a member of an association formed to promote the election of women to these bodies, and as President of the Board of Trade had secured the passage of a bill allowing women to be elected to town councils.⁵⁵ There was a long tradition of women serving in local government; as well as those who served in a voluntary capacity, some three thousand women had been elected

⁵⁰ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c816, Herbert Samuel. See chapter 6 for more on the Luxury Duty committee.

⁵¹ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1872, Sir Willoughby Dickinson (Liberal). Dickinson was a long-standing supporter of women's suffrage. The Joint Select Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and Sexual Offences Bill was examining proposals for changes in the law on venereal disease and the age of consent. Women were involved as witnesses, not as members.

⁵² Gronno, 'The Woman MP', pp. 32-33.

⁵³ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c817, Herbert Samuel. Also c827, Robert Cecil.

⁵⁴ Ibid, c817, Herbert Samuel. Katharine Talbot Wallas served in this and many roles on the LCC. Jane Martin, 'Wallas, Katharine Talbot (1864–1944)', *ODNB*.

⁵⁵ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110, c817, Herbert Samuel. Samuel referred to the Women's Local Government Society and the Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act, 1907 c. 33.

representatives in local government in Britain for decades before 1918. Providing they met certain ratepaying qualifications, women could be elected as members of education boards between 1870 and 1902, Poor Law Guardians from 1875, and members of District and Parish Councils and London vestries from 1894.⁵⁶

Opponents in 1918 argued that there were too few women in local government to draw any conclusion; 'We had an illustration only last week of the feeling of the country on the question of the election of women in Swansea' in municipal elections where there were 15 women candidates for 28 seats but none returned.⁵⁷ In fact at the time Frederick Banbury and his colleagues were dismissing their efforts in the House of Commons in 1918, there were 15 women elected or co-opted onto 80 county boroughs, 11 on 245 town councils, 8 on county councils, 23 on London boroughs, 19 on urban district councils and 1,585 Poor Law guardians of whom 200 were also rural district councillors.⁵⁸ It is likely the hostile MPs were referring to the small numbers of women elected to town, county and borough councils. Women had only been eligible to stand for county and borough councils since 1907, and found it much more difficult to stand or make an impact on these. Serving on poor law or education boards could be interpreted as an extension of women's natural roles in caring for children and the sick, rather than as a reason for them to play a similar part on a wider local or national scale. City council elections were seen as dry runs for Parliamentary elections; party politics played a much more important role there than in other local government elections where candidates might be elected unopposed or under labels such as 'ratepayer'. Patricia Hollis explains how it was precisely because women did not have the Parliamentary vote that they lacked leverage and were not taken seriously as council candidates at local level;⁵⁹ it was therefore a 'Catch-22' situation to argue that they did not deserve Parliamentary seats because they were not winning seats locally.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies elect: women in English local government, 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1987).

⁵⁷ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c823, Banbury; 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1871, Terrell.

⁵⁸ Hollis, *Ladies elect*, p398.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p462.

⁶⁰ It would be interesting to compare the inter-war picture of women in local government with women in Parliament in more detail, but there is no comprehensive analysis to compare with Hollis, *Ladies elect*. Anne Baldwin has identified some trends, finding that by 1928 women in London were being elected in greater numbers than in other areas, and for political parties, but that many counties had a low representation of women. Anne Baldwin, 'The relationship between changing party politics and the

The experience of other countries

Examples from various other countries were cited in Parliamentary debate, including by Basil Peto on New Zealand. He declared 'for twenty-five years women had... been eligible to sit as Members there, and that so far not a single one had been elected.'⁶¹ Nobody corrected him, but this was factually wrong; women were not entitled to become MPs at this time in New Zealand. New Zealand was the first country in the world to allow women to vote in 1893, but this did not allow them to sit as MPs. Women were only made eligible to stand for the House of Representatives by the Women's Parliamentary Rights Act 1919; the first woman MP was Elizabeth McCombs in 1933.⁶²

In a similar argument Frederick Banbury quoted the example of Australia, saying a 'Miss Eva Goldstein' had failed to get into every single Parliament in Australia.⁶³ (He meant Vida Goldstein, who had unsuccessfully stood for the Australian Commonwealth House of Representatives and Senate).⁶⁴ However Banbury had grossly simplified the situation in Australia. Women were allowed to vote at an early date (between 1894 and 1908 depending on state), and the Commonwealth legislature allowed women to stand as candidates from its inception in 1902 (none was elected until Dame Enid Lyons in 1943), but the only state Parliament which allowed women to stand was South Australia from 1894 (none was actually elected until 1959). In New South Wales and Queensland women were not allowed to be candidates until 1918; in Western Australia until 1920; in Tasmania until 1921 and Victoria until 1923. At the time of this debate therefore most Australian women had little opportunity to be Parliamentary candidates. The first Australian woman MP at state level was Edith Cowan in Western Australia in 1921.⁶⁵

elected representation of women in local government, 1919-1939' (University of Huddersfield. MA, 2007).

⁶¹ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c831, Peto.

⁶² Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press, 1987). Sandra Wallace, *Out of the home and into the House: New Zealand women's fight to enter Parliament* (Wellington: Department of Justice, 1993).

⁶³ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c823, Banbury.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 23 Oct 1918.

⁶⁵ Audrey Oldfield, *Woman suffrage in Australia: a gift or a struggle?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Although premature, the points made by Peto and Banbury were prophetic in that both New Zealand and Australia had a low proportion of women MPs for many years to come.

Australia's record of female MPs at either state or federal level was 'very poor when compared with countries in which women were enfranchised much later in the century'; when the suffragist and journalist Ada Holman visited the UK in 1925 to find eight female MPs including one minister, she wrote "It was exciting, though painful in contrast to our own womanless legislatures."⁶⁶ Reasons included political parties refusing to select women; women not having a municipal vote until the First World War, which deprived them of a route to Parliamentary experience (this incidentally suggests the importance of women's long participation in local government in the UK); women wealthy enough to run formed only a small class in an immigrant country where they were a minority of the population; and women outside capital cities had almost insuperable problems of travel. Eventually Australian women were caught in a circle of illogic where they so rarely won seats this was justification for not selecting them.

In contrast to New Zealand and Australia, J D Rees spoke of Finland and how women had been MPs and 'filled the most important offices, and I am bound to say they acquitted themselves right well – a fact which I have hitherto concealed, until I knew that women got the vote in this country'.⁶⁷ Leaving aside Rees's lack of shame at his outrageous concealment, it is interesting he chose to cite the situation in Finland, which was not only the first country in Europe to give women the vote and allow them to be MPs in 1906, but also had no fewer than 19 women MPs elected to the Eduskunta in 1907, out of a total of 200. The UK would not reach the dizzy heights of 19 women MPs simultaneously until 1945. Given the restrictions in New Zealand and Australia in not allowing women to stand as candidates, it can be argued that in comparison Finland was the first to achieve 'genuine' democracy where women and men were politically equal. The remarkable situation in Finland, an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire since 1809, resulted from a political environment where only 8% of the population could vote in the early 20th century, and a predominantly agrarian-based economy which largely lacked the gendered concept of separate private and public spheres. Demands for universal suffrage from a labour movement in which women were largely on an equal footing with men, allied with a mass temperance movement, met with success. Many of the first 19 women MPs in Finland in 1907 were frontline labour activists, holding positions in

⁶⁶ Oldfield, *Woman suffrage in Australia*, p16, p222.

⁶⁷ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c848, J D Rees.

workers' associations and unions.⁶⁸ Unfortunately the subsequent re-imposition of 'russification' in Finland after 1907 'had the effect of rendering the enfranchisement of women meaningless in practical political terms' until the Russian revolutions of 1917.⁶⁹ Nevertheless in 1918 there were 24 women in the Finnish Parliament, 12% of members. This compared across the globe with one woman MP in Holland (even though women could not vote in Holland), one deputy member in Norway (substituting for a male MP), one woman member of the United States Congress and two women in the Provincial Legislature of Alberta, Canada.⁷⁰ Finland was clearly leading the field.

'Packed on the bench like herrings': The culture of the House of Commons

Further arguments against the resolution and at second reading included various along the lines that the House of Commons was not a suitable place for a women. Women should not be brought into the dirty business of politics. 'I opposed votes for women for one reason... because it would derogate from the influence of women.'⁷¹ Sir Hamar Greenwood protested against this: 'I protest against the idea that there is anything unwomanly or unmatronly in a woman doing her share in carrying on the affairs of a democratic country.'⁷² Some MPs feared that women MPs would be the beginning of the end. 'Once admitted to the House there is no possible reason why a women should not be the Speaker or the Speakeress of the House as well as occupying any other position.'⁷³ A real die-hard Conservative MP, Admiral of the Fleet Hedworth Meux, declared, 'Suppose you have a female Prime Minister, and suppose she is in a

⁶⁸ Irma Sulkunen, 'Suffrage, Nation and Political Mobilisation - the Finnish case in an international context', pp83-105 in Irma Sulkunen, Seija-Leena Navala-Nurmi and Pirjo Markkola, eds, *Suffrage Gender and Citizenship: International Perspectives on Parliamentary Reforms* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

⁶⁹ Richard J Evans, *The feminists: women's emancipation movements in Europe, America and Australasia, 1840-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

⁷⁰ *The Times*, 19 Oct 1918. Anthony Masters writes, 'In March 1918 Miss Agnes McPhail [sic] took her place in the Canadian House of Commons'. Masters, *Nancy Astor*, p92. The date as well as the spelling of her name is erroneous: Agnes MacPhail was elected in 1921. Library and Archives Canada website, <<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/030001-1318-e.html>> Accessed 19 Mar 2012.

⁷¹ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c835, Craik.

⁷² HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1876, Sir Hamar Greenwood (Liberal).

⁷³ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c832, Peto. Betty Boothroyd (Labour) became the first woman Speaker of the House of Commons in 1992.

state which every woman who loves her husband ought to be, what is going to happen?'⁷⁴ Meux also argued strongly that women were physically not fit for late sittings. 'We go on till eleven or twelve o'clock at night. Is that a thing for any woman to do?... I say that no woman is fit by her physical organisation to stand the strain of Parliament.' On all night sittings: 'It will be a question of "Who will take me home?"' This was countered by Richard Hazleton; 'he did not think of the hundreds of thousands of women who have to work from morning till night, and very often all night.'⁷⁵ Meux said that at big debates MPs sat 'packed on the benches like herrings and I have seen right Hon Gentlemen so crowded on the Front Benches that they have had their arms round one another's waists.' He would oppose the bill even though it would lose him votes and possibly the election (he actually stood down at the 1918 election so this did not apply). Meux also expressed concern for the birth-rate; 'the ambition of every right minded woman when she is married is to produce a beautiful child, a boy more beautiful than her husband or a girl more beautiful than herself.'⁷⁶ Meux got short shrift from his fellow MPs: Samuel said in strong words that Meux's speech 'was of a kind which was distasteful to very many Members of the House.'⁷⁷

'You ought not to strain at the gnat': Conversions

Interestingly a number of MPs were in favour who had previously vehemently opposed women's suffrage. Though some continued to say they thought it had been the wrong decision, they nevertheless saw women MPs as a necessary next step. Lord Islington remarked 'Those who were most prominent in opposition to the Bill for enfranchising women are to be found supporters of this Bill.'⁷⁸ These MPs included Arnold Ward, who had led the anti-suffrage forces in the Commons to the bitter end.⁷⁹ Ward now argued 'what use is there to

⁷⁴ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1877, Sir Hedworth Meux (Conservative).

⁷⁵ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c851, Meux; c854, Richard Hazleton (Irish Nationalist).

⁷⁶ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1876-7, Meux. Meux was married but had no children (whether his wife agreed with him on the ambition of all right-minded women is not known). Meux was known as Hedworth Lambton until 1911, when he changed his surname in order to gain an inheritance from an older unrelated woman, Lady Valerie Meux.

⁷⁷ Ibid, c1880, Herbert Samuel.

⁷⁸ HL Deb 12 Nov 1918 vol 31 c1236, Under-Secretary of State for India (Lord Islington, Conservative). Islington was previously Governor of New Zealand.

⁷⁹ Son of Mrs Humphrey Ward, one of the founders of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League in 1908.

retreat to a perfectly untenable line of trenches in the rear...?' J D Rees, although clear about how forcefully he had always opposed women's suffrage, nevertheless accepted women MPs as the necessary follow-up. Former Prime Minister Herbert Asquith said, 'You have the camel; you ought not to strain at the gnat.'⁸⁰

Sir Charles Hobhouse declared 'I think I was almost the last person on this bench to offer opposition of the extension of the franchise to women' but now they had it they must also become MPs.⁸¹ Hobhouse was indeed a notorious opponent of women's suffrage, and known for a speech in Bristol on 16 February 1912 in which he had said, 'the absorption of women in politics would prejudice the number, character and vigour of our future race, would lead to the limitation of their capacity and inclination for maternity, and to their unwillingness and incapacity to manage the home.'⁸² By 1918 Hobhouse had not changed his mind, declaring that 'the number of ladies who have distinguished themselves in public life and who marry and have descendants is extremely limited.'⁸³ Yet he supported the resolution. Women should become MPs.

Decisive division

Overall the case for change made during debates on the resolution was 'overwhelming... the whole attitude of society has changed and has done so progressively. No doubt there were times when some ecclesiastical opinion doubted whether women had souls.' The resolution was passed on a division with 274 votes to just 25.⁸⁴ 'The only sound... heard in the Chamber when the figures were announced was an involuntary burst of laughter from the Ladies Gallery.'⁸⁵ Observers in the Ladies' Gallery included Edith How Martyn, who was to stand as a candidate in the 1918 election.⁸⁶ Major Terrell subsequently declared that MPs only voted for

⁸⁰ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c833-4, Arnold Ward (Conservative); c 847, J D Rees; c839, Herbert Asquith (Liberal).

⁸¹ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1872, Charles Hobhouse (Liberal).

⁸² Charles Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: from the diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, ed Edward David (London: J Murray, 1977), introduction p8. Hobhouse's speech was blamed for inciting violence by the suffragettes.

⁸³ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1873, Hobhouse.

⁸⁴ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c827, Lord Robert Cecil; c856, division result.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 24 Oct 1918.

⁸⁶ Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, p6.

the resolution 'in the hope thereby of saving their seats,' and invoked the curious argument, 'That sort of thing is contrary to true democratic principles.'⁸⁷ Banbury argued that had the resolution vote been by secret ballot rather than open voting 'we should have won.'⁸⁸ Similar arguments were made in the House of Lords. 'A decision arrived at by sheer funk. No one dared to vote against the women who was going to stand again.' 'I am not in the least moved by the figures of the Division taken in a panic in the House of Commons the other day.'⁸⁹ These intriguing arguments demonstrate just how important and powerful the future female electorate was perceived, or feared, to be.

Samuel's resolution swiftly led to a bill, backed by the government. Lord Robert Cecil, Assistant-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, introduced it, supported by the Solicitor-General and the Minister of Blockade.⁹⁰ At second reading on 4 November 1918 Sir Charles Henry asked why this bill was under the auspices of the Foreign Office, to which Cecil answered light heartedly, 'Because it is the most enlightened office in the state.' He added that perhaps he had been asked to take charge because he had an interest in the subject. Samuel declared Cecil 'is undoubtedly one of the most enlightened Members of the House.'⁹¹ Lord Robert Cecil was indeed known for his independent views including his sympathy towards women's suffrage, and the government had many other preoccupations at this late stage of the war. Although Cecil steered the bill through from the government position, he thought it should go further in removing all disabilities of sex, such as allowing women to become solicitors and barristers; Samuel was another among several MPs who argued this line, but there was never any possibility of extending this bill in that way in 1918.⁹²

The age question: a curious anomaly

⁸⁷ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1870, Terrell.

⁸⁸ Ibid, c1883, Banbury. Also c1877, Meux.

⁸⁹ HL Deb 12 Nov 1918 vol 31, c1243, Lord Balfour of Burleigh; c1246, Viscount Chaplin.

⁹⁰ Gordon Hewart (Liberal) and Sir Laming Worthington Evans (Conservative).

⁹¹ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110, c1867, Charles Henry (Liberal); c1879, Lord Robert Cecil; c1882, Herbert Samuel. Cecil was married to Lady Eleanor Lambton, sister of Hedworth Meux who opposed the bill so bitterly.

⁹² HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c828, Lord Robert Cecil; 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1871, Major John Waller Hills (Conservative); c1882, Herbert Samuel. These issues were postponed until the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919; see chapter 2.

Perhaps the most curious aspect of the bill, and Act as it was passed, was that there was no restriction on age. The Representation of the People Act 1918 had allowed women who met certain property qualifications to vote at age 30; this restriction was adopted to avoid women becoming the majority of the electorate because of the demographic imbalance caused by the loss of men during the war.⁹³ But as the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 had no age restriction, women could stand as MPs before they would be able to vote at age 30. This would eventually lead to underage women candidates, such as Margaret Henderson Kidd, who stood as Unionist candidate in a by-election in Linlithgow on 4 April 1928, but was unable to vote for herself, at the age of 28;⁹⁴ Megan Lloyd George who was selected as Liberal candidate for Anglesey on 24 May 1928 when she was just 26 years old⁹⁵ (both happened ahead of the Equal Franchise Act, which passed on 14 June 1928); and even the anomaly of a woman MP elected despite not being able to vote for herself. Jennie Lee was just 23 when selected as Labour Parliamentary candidate for North Lanark and 24 when elected in a by-election on 21 March 1929. This was not too earth-shattering as it happened only a couple of months before women were first allowed to vote at 21 in the general election on 30 May 1929, and Lee remarks in her autobiography, 'The Tories could not attack me on account of my youth for all the political parties were angling for the flapper vote.'⁹⁶ Nevertheless the *Manchester Guardian* remarked 'It is amusing to reflect that no girl of her own age had a chance of voting for the youngest woman MP.'⁹⁷ There is at least one more example of a woman under 30 standing as a Parliamentary candidate as early as the general election of 1923.⁹⁸

⁹³ See chapter 4 on equal franchise for more on this.

⁹⁴ Margaret Kidd, an eminent Scottish advocate, stood following the death of her father James Kidd. She polled 9,268 votes (31.5%) but lost to Emmanuel Shinwell. F W S Craig, ed, *British parliamentary election results, 1918-1949* (London: Macmillan, 1977). Isobel Anne Poole, 'Kidd, Dame Margaret Henderson (1900–1989)', *ODNB*.

⁹⁵ Mervyn Jones, *A radical life: the biography of Megan Lloyd George, 1902-1966* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p75.

⁹⁶ Jennie Lee, *My life with Nye* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), p66.

⁹⁷ Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, p66, citing *The Times*, 23 Mar 1924.

⁹⁸ Referred to by Isaac Foot (Liberal) in HC Deb 29 Feb 1924 vol 170 c892. 'It is possible for a woman who is only just over 21 years of age to stand as a candidate for Parliament. At the last Election such a lady did stand in one of the northern counties ... a most effective candidate.' This woman is likely to be one of the following: Miss R M Parsons (Unionist candidate in Lancaster, Ince), Miss M E Pilkington (Unionist in St Helens), Miss Mary Grant (Liberal in Yorks, West Riding, Pontefract) or Miss Ursula Williams (Liberal in Durham, Consett) – probably Grant or Williams, as Foot would have been more likely to refer to a

Samuel argued that the thirty year rule for women voters was an arbitrary distinction so women voters would not outnumber men, and this simply did not apply to candidates. He even explained 'I was myself a candidate for Parliament some years before I was a voter.'⁹⁹ Samuel was an unsuccessful Liberal candidate for South Oxfordshire in 1895 and 1900; he was asked to stand in 1893 while still an undergraduate at Oxford.¹⁰⁰ The fact that a man did not have to be able to vote to be a candidate is perhaps surprising; yet the assumption that by 1885 almost all adult males were enfranchised has been shown to be false by historians who have pointed out the difficulties for many men (especially young men) in fulfilling the registration requirements for the occupation, household, lodger and service franchises.¹⁰¹ Samuel would have been age 25 and unmarried at the time of the 1895 election, and presumably not qualified as a voter then either because of the property qualification or registration requirements. Examples of very young historical MPs cited during Parliamentary debate included Fox and Russell ('Neither of whom were wholly undistinguished Members of this House') and Pitt.¹⁰² Cecil for the government was vehement in support of Samuel on the age issue: 'The question is whether there is really any sense in cutting down the class of women from whom they may choose their representative... surely the right thing is to give them free choice.'¹⁰³

At committee stage Sir Charles Henry moved an amendment to restrict women candidates to those above the age of 30. 'You are giving them legislative functions when they have not the franchise... A flapper might present herself for election'. He argued that a girl or a woman legally 'never reaches her majority' and a girl even younger than 21 could therefore stand.

Liberal. Of the 34 women candidates in 1923, the rest are either readily identifiable women known to be over 30, or not standing in a constituency that could be called northern. The 1911 census identifies a Mary Grant in Pontefract born in 1903, who would fit Foot's description perfectly.

⁹⁹ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c821, Herbert Samuel.

¹⁰⁰ Samuel, *Memoirs*.

¹⁰¹ Neal Blewitt, 'The franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885-1918' pp27-56 in *Past and Present* 32, 1965. Duncan Tanner, *Political change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Tanner estimates in 1915 there were 4 million men excluded from the franchise, including 2.5 million younger single men who were less likely to be householders; they may have lived with parents, or worked as indoor servants, or moved frequently (e.g. soldiers), or rented at a low rate.

¹⁰² HC Deb 6 Nov 1918 vol 110 c2192, Lord Robert Cecil; HL Deb 12 Nov 1918 vol 31 c1242, Viscount Haldane. They refer to the well-known Whig statesmen Charles James Fox, who was elected at the age of just 19, and Lord John Russell and William Pitt the Younger, both elected at age 21.

¹⁰³ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1879, Lord Robert Cecil.

(Cecil refuted this, arguing that no man under 21 could be elected).¹⁰⁴ Henry cited examples of age restrictions in other countries, including France and Italy where a deputy had to be 25, and in France a senator had to be age 40. Since women did not even get the vote in France and Italy until 1945,¹⁰⁵ this was not a terribly obvious or useful argument to make. Banbury argued that when women were able to be MPs at 21 they would demand the vote at 21 too. 'What really has happened is this: whenever a woman takes a little she generally says "that is all I want..." but as soon as she gets that she wants something more.' Cecil flatly rejected all these arguments, and William Hume-Williams urged Henry not to press his 'somewhat ungallant self-denying Amendment,' and he didn't; there was no division.¹⁰⁶ The age argument came up again in the Lords; Viscount Chaplin stated, 'Obviously this is an absurdity.' Viscount Haldane countered that Chaplin 'presents a magnificent spectacle of one left high and dry upon the beach'.¹⁰⁷

The bill in the House of Lords

The bill was introduced in the Lords by Lord Islington, Under-Secretary of State for India, on 12 November 1918. Arguments were generally very similar to those in the House of Commons. Additionally there was a constitutional issue; as the bill affected only the Commons, 'rejection by your Lordships would be unfortunate.' The Lord Chancellor (Lord Finlay) weighed in with this view: 'We should not have a quarrel with the House of Commons on a matter affecting the constitution of that House, a contest in which this House would ultimately be beaten.' Islington hoped they would support it 'even though in some cases it may be a support strongly tinged with reluctance and in a spirit of resignation'¹⁰⁸ and this duly happened. Chaplin moved to delay the second reading but it passed without debate the following day.

Extending the bill to allow women to sit in the House of Lords was considered. This had been suggested in the Commons at second reading, when J H Whitehouse asked could this bill not

¹⁰⁴ HC Deb 6 Nov 1918 vol 110 c2186-7, Sir C Henry; c2192, Lord Robert Cecil. Cecil conveniently forgot the example of Charles James Fox.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House*, (London: Athlone Press, 1979), p189.

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb 6 Nov 1918 vol 110 c2189, Banbury; c2190, Lord Robert Cecil; c2193, W E Hume-Williams (Conservative).

¹⁰⁷ HL Deb 12 Nov 1918 vol 31, c1240, Viscount Chaplin; c1241, Viscount Haldane (Liberal).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, c1236, Under-Secretary of State for India (Lord Islington); c. 1245, Lord Chancellor (Lord Finlay, Liberal); cc1236-7, Under-Secretary of State for India.

apply to both Houses of Parliament?¹⁰⁹ As was pointed out, the title of the Bill was 'quite deliberately drawn to cover both Houses of Parliament.'¹¹⁰ In the Commons, even Admiral Meux opined, 'The House of Lords is a totally different proposition. They have very reasonable and leisurely hours, and I believe they nearly always go home to dinner. I can see no reason why the women should not go there.'¹¹¹ Cecil sympathised but was clear that including the Lords would cause constitutional problems.¹¹² At Committee stage Richard Holt moved an amendment not to allow peeresses in their own right into the Commons, lest this meant they could end up sitting in both Houses simultaneously, but withdrew it after assurances from Sir Ernest Pollock that this would not be possible.¹¹³ Also at Committee stage Henry moved an amendment to extend the bill to the Lords; Cecil opposed on the grounds that this would be actually placing women in the Lords (rather than giving them the opportunity), the Lords should decide such a thing themselves, and that if the Lords opposed this, the whole bill might be lost. 'Politics is very largely a question of expediency.'¹¹⁴ Henry did not press his amendment.

In the Lords, Viscount Haldane tried to amend the bill at committee stage to allow peeresses in their own right to sit in the Lords. 'In what an extraordinary position we should be. A woman may sit on the Throne; a woman may sit in the House of Commons; but the one place where she is not to sit is in the House of Lords.' Lord Islington for the Government was unable to accept the amendment 'due to no hostility whatever to the actual proposal' but because it went beyond the scope and spirit of the Bill before them, and the Lord Chancellor backed this up with a great many technical issues about peeresses in their own right.¹¹⁵ Haldane's amendment was lost on a division, 14 to 33. This failed attempt was a scene-setter for almost annual debates on the issue during the 1920s; once women were allowed into the Commons,

¹⁰⁹ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1867, John Howard Whitehouse (Liberal).

¹¹⁰ HL Deb 15 Nov 1918 vol 32 c147, Earl of Selborne (Liberal).

¹¹¹ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1877, Meux.

¹¹² Ibid, c1878, Lord Robert Cecil.

¹¹³ HC Deb 6 Nov 1918 vol 110 c2194, Richard Holt (Liberal); c2195, Sir Ernest Pollock (Conservative). Pollock argued that as peers could not sit in the Commons, a peeress in her own right would have the same disability.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, cc2197-8, Sir C. Henry; c2190 and c2200, Lord Robert Cecil.

¹¹⁵ HL Deb 15 Nov 1918 vol 32 c140, Viscount Haldane; c148, Earl of Selborne; c143, Under-Secretary of State for India; cc150-4, Lord Chancellor.

the debate on allowing them into the Lords really began, although it would not happen until the Life Peerages Act of 1958.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was passed with Royal Assent on the last day of the Parliamentary session, 21 November 1918 – just a few weeks before the general election on 14 December 1918. The immediate result was that seventeen women stood in the general election, of whom one was elected but did not take her seat (Constance Markievicz). The following year saw Nancy Astor become the first woman MP to take her seat following a by-election. The number of woman MPs rose very slowly during the inter-war years, reaching a high of 15 for a short period in 1931. The number of women candidates in general elections also rose only very slowly, reaching a high of 69 in 1929.¹¹⁷

Only a small number of women were directly affected by this legislation. There has been much consideration ever since about why so few women have become MPs, explanations for the inter-war period including general attitudes to and discrimination against women; self-perceptions; practical difficulties of a political career; problems of being adopted by selection panels in winnable seats; and the first past the post system.¹¹⁸ Such factors continued well into the twentieth century and beyond; studies of the large number of women Labour MPs elected in 1997 show similar themes including a reluctance among women to put themselves forward, a fear of the 'bear pit' atmosphere of the Commons, and problems juggling a political career with a family.¹¹⁹ Interwar women MPs generally chose to represent their party and constituents first, and women generally as a secondary consideration. They mostly fought shy of being pigeonholed into 'women's issues' and did not work together as a group, except on rare occasions such as the Woman Power Committee during the Second World War.

¹¹⁶ Sutherland, 'Peeresses, parliament, and prejudice'.

¹¹⁷ David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British political facts, 1900-1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p249.

¹¹⁸ Vallance, *Women in the House*; Beverley P Stobaugh, *Women and Parliament 1918-1970* (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1978).

¹¹⁹ Linda McDougall, *Westminster women* (London: Vintage, 1998). Sarah Childs, Joni Lovenduski and Rosie Campbell, 'Women at the Top 2005: Changing Numbers, Changing Politics?' (Hansard Society, 2005).

Yet it was of intrinsic value for the women's movement once the vote was won that women should become MPs. Further barriers such as women as government ministers could now be challenged.¹²⁰ Frances Stevenson recorded in her diary the day Astor took her seat, 'It really was a thrilling moment... after all these hundreds of years, this was the first time that a woman had set foot upon that floor to represent the people.'¹²¹ Edith How-Martyn argued in a pamphlet *The Need for Women Members of Parliament* issued shortly after Nancy Astor's election, 'As powerful as the possession of the vote may be, the actual representation within the House by women is immeasurably more so and the chief aim of feminists for the next few years should be to increase the number of women MPs.'¹²² Brian Harrison's study of the first women MPs concludes 'The most important of all the women MPs' contributions is the fact that they entered a men's house and succeeded there.'¹²³ The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was the legislation enabling this situation. As Mary Stocks remarked, 'Only feminists who lived through the early twenties will be able fully to recapture the successive sensations of horror, stunned surprise, and dawning adulation, provoked by the advent of the first woman at Westminster.'¹²⁴

¹²⁰ The fear in some quarters about women in Parliament was replaced by fears of women in government. An anonymous novel allegedly by an MP, published in 1923, envisaged an all-female government, eventually brought down by gossip and scandal. *When Woman Rules! A tale of the first women's government. By a well-known Member of Parliament* (London: John Long, 1923), p252.

¹²¹ Frances Stevenson, *Lloyd George a diary: by Frances Stevenson*, ed A J P Taylor (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p190.

¹²² How-Martyn, *The Need for Women Members of Parliament*, foreword.

¹²³ Harrison, 'Women in a men's house', p654.

¹²⁴ Brookes, *Women at Westminster*, p.xi.

Chapter Two

Widening employment opportunities for women: The passage of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919

The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 begins:

A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation.¹

These may seem initially to be powerful words. Women could now enter professions such as law and accounting for the first time, and be appointed as jurors and magistrates. However, mention of the Act produces none of the resonance of (say) the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. Historians assessing the significance of the Sex Disqualification Act 1919 give it a lukewarm reception. Martin Pugh calls it 'a broken reed in the face of the resurrection of obstacles such as the bar on married women and further protective legislation.'² F A R Bennion considers how rarely the Act was used in litigation in an article tellingly titled 'The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act – 60 Inglorious Years'.³ Meta Zimmeck, in her study of women in the interwar civil service, says 'the Act was, so far as women civil servants were concerned, a dead letter.'⁴ Harold Smith is categorical about its 'deficiencies as an instrument for change', pointing out that the marriage bar increased substantially in the 1920s and became standard practice in teaching for the first time.⁵ Alison Oram, in her study of women teachers, says that the Sex Disqualification Act 'simply freed the employer from any restrictions, but gave no rights to the employee.'⁶ It is generally pointed out that the Act was an enabling one; it allowed the

¹ *Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act* c.71, 1919.

² Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd ed 2000), p90.

³ F A R Bennion, 'The sex disqualification (removal) act - 60 inglorious years', *New Law Journal* 129 (1979).

⁴ Meta Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems for the employment of women in the British civil service, 1919-1939' pp901-924 in *Historical Journal* 27(4) 1984, p909.

⁵ H L Smith, 'British Feminism in the 1920s' in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (ed H L Smith, Aldershot: Elgar, 1990), p53.

⁶ Alison Oram, *Women teachers and feminist politics, 1900-39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p163.

appointment and holding of posts, but apparently did not affect the employer's ability to dismiss women. Perhaps the most famous example of the Act's failure to enable a women to take up a post was Lady Rhondda's failed claim to take her seat in the House of Lords, based on this Act.⁷

Yet the first ten words of the Act appear to make clear that neither sex nor marriage was supposed to be a bar any longer. So what did Parliament think it was doing when it passed this Act? What were the intentions behind it?

The Women's Emancipation Bill

Some of the disillusionment behind the Sex Disqualification Act is grounded in the fact that it was not the first choice of the House of Commons. It was a government bill introduced to kill off a more radical private members' bill, the Women's Emancipation Bill. The Women's Emancipation Bill was introduced by Labour MP Benjamin Spoor on 21 March 1919 'To remove certain restraints and disabilities imposed on women.'⁸ The bill contained three clauses:

- 1 – to remove the disqualification of women for holding civil and judicial appointments
- 2 – to include women on equal franchise
- 3 – to allow women to sit and vote in the House of Lords.

The Women's Emancipation Bill was high on the Labour Party's agenda; they used their second place in the private members' bill ballot for it.⁹ It successfully passed all stages in the House of Commons, including a vote on closure at second reading and a division at third reading, the latter against whipped government opposition. However the government then introduced its own Sex Disqualification Bill in the House of Lords. The second readings of the two competing

⁷ Shirley M Eoff, *Viscountess Rhondda: equalitarian feminist* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991). Duncan Sutherland, 'Peeresses, parliament, and prejudice: the admission of women to the House of Lords, 1900-1963' (University of Cambridge PhD, 2000).

⁸ HC Bill 38 (1919).

⁹ *The Times*, 9 Apr 1919. Ballots were held for backbench MPs to have the honour of moving a second reading of a bill on a Friday, the day in which private members' bills had precedence. Typically about 250 members would put their name down; some with personal causes perhaps influenced by lobbyists, others as a party duty. Jennings, *Parliament*, p350; P A Bromhead, *Private Members' Bills in the British parliament* (Routledge & K Paul, 1956); Peter G Richards, 'Private Members' Legislation' pp292-328 in *The House of Commons in the Twentieth Century: essays by members of the Study of Parliament Group* (ed, S A Walkland, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

bills took place within two days of each other; the Women's Emancipation Bill was 'torn to pieces'¹⁰ by the Lord Chancellor and inevitably fell.

In the event, only the substance of the first of the Women's Emancipation Bill clauses, on civil and judicial appointments, made it through to become law in the Sex Disqualification Act. The clauses about the franchise and women peers were lost. Inevitably, unfavourable comparisons between the two bills were drawn, by historians and contemporary commentators. Harold Smith states the Sex Disqualification bill 'was carefully drafted to avoid the more sweeping changes proposed in the Women's Emancipation Bill'.¹¹ Millicent Fawcett welcomed the Sex Disqualification Act 1919 but regretted it was less comprehensive than the Women's Emancipation Bill.¹² But the MPs who passed first the Women's Emancipation Bill and then the Sex Disqualification Act 1919 did not intend to pass a 'broken reed'; they saw themselves presenting a powerful weapon to women. This may be illustrated by a closer look at the Parliamentary Debates during the passage of the bills.

The Women's Emancipation Bill in the House of Commons: overwhelming support

The second reading debate on the Women's Emancipation Bill is significant because when the Sex Disqualification Bill came to the Commons there were no debates at second reading. Second reading is when the principles of a bill are considered, so in effect the principles of the Sex Disqualification Bill were also considered in the Women's Emancipation Bill debates. The Women's Emancipation Bill was debated on 4 April 1919. Twenty-seven MPs spoke over 67 columns of debate, and the tone is remarkably sympathetic. Only seven MPs spoke in opposition to the bill; and their concern was to oppose equal franchise; virtually nothing was said against the civil and judicial appointments clause, or women peers.¹³

However, many detailed arguments were made on the need for women to attain civil and judicial appointments, and on the franchise. In speech after speech, MPs argued that it was a matter of simple justice ('I believe every woman should have the right to enter into that

¹⁰ HL Deb 22 Jul 1919 vol 35 c901, Lord Kimberley (Labour).

¹¹ Smith, 'British Feminism', p52.

¹² Pat Thane, 'What difference did the vote make?' in *Women, privilege and power: British politics 1750 to the present*, ed Amanda Vickery (Stanford, Cambridge 2001)

¹³ The women peers clause was only mentioned in passing, e.g. HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 c1586, Sir Robert Newman (Conservative).

industry for which she has the qualification'); it was the logical and inevitable result of women being given the vote; that women deserved it because of their role in the war effort – this was a particularly common theme; that women would bring additional qualities ('the nation has, by limiting the power of women, deprived itself of the some of the keenest brains in the country'); that 'a woman matures much more quickly than a man' so were more suited than men in some ways; even that young people between the ages of 20 and 30 deserved the vote more than the old ('The young men have suffered and bled and the young women have suffered in tears because the white-haired and hoary antediluvians who were governing our country... were unable to see what lay as clearly before them as the noses on their faces').¹⁴

Various MPs cited their own experience. Several MPs who were magistrates or lawyers supported the idea of women as lawyers and jurors. J Bertrand Watson, lawyer, councillor and later a police magistrate, said, 'I have never been able to see any good and valid reason why women should not be able to practise either as solicitors or as members of the Bar.'¹⁵ Others testified to the suitability of women for public life: Alfred Yeo, JP and former London County Council member, said, 'After a lifetime of work spent with women on public boards, I have yet to learn that they are not worthy of the highest honours that the State can confer upon them.'¹⁶ And words were even spoken about their competence for politics: 'I had the honour to be opposed at the General Election by... a very gifted and intelligent lady.... that I could have voted for if she were in the same class and in the same party as I was.'¹⁷ The lady in question was Violet Markham, who stood for the Liberals against William Carter in Mansfield in 1918.¹⁸ Charles Edgar Loseby, a schoolmaster and barrister, cited the example of his six 'shabby genteel' sisters who had the options only of being governesses, nurses, or schoolmistresses, honourable but 'underpaid, overworked and ill-fed professions', and 'all other avenues were closed'.¹⁹ It was also strongly argued that the government had promised equality in the

¹⁴ Ibid, c1596, Robert Young (Labour); c1593, Lt-Col Walter Guinness (Conservative); c1599, Hugh Edwards (Liberal); c1574, George Thorne (Labour); c1571, Major O'Neill (Ulster Unionist); c1614, Captain Walter Elliot (Conservative).

¹⁵ Ibid c1568, Captain J Bertrand Watson (Liberal).

¹⁶ Ibid c1586, Sir Alfred Yeo (Liberal).

¹⁷ Ibid c1592, William Carter (Labour).

¹⁸ Helen Jones, 'Markham, Violet Rosa (1872–1959)', *ODNB*.

¹⁹ HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 cc1605-1606, Captain Charles Edgar Loseby (Coalition National Democratic).

Coalition election manifesto, which had declared, 'It will be the duty of the new government to remove all existing inequalities as between men and women.'²⁰ This was generally taken to cover the civil and judicial appointments clause. Whether it was also supposed to cover the franchise was a matter for disagreement.

The role of the Labour Party

Labour MPs were particularly keen to stress that they had always supported equality of the sexes (the bill was 'simply the natural sequence of all our past work and past efforts').²¹ By contrast with the lawyers in the ranks of the Liberals and Conservatives, virtually all the Labour MPs who spoke in strong support of the bill came from mining backgrounds; a large proportion of Labour MPs elected at the 1918 general election were miners.²² Adamson had been a miner for 27 years; William Carter was a former miner; William Lunn had begun his mining career at age 12, and Tom Cape at age 13. Benjamin Spoor, who was not present at the second reading debate but had introduced the bill, represented the strong mining constituency of Bishops Auckland.²³ Although Pamela Graves has remarked 'the miners were not known for supporting feminist issues',²⁴ other historians have shown miners pursuing an advanced line on issues such as birth control and maternal health.²⁵ It is noteworthy to find all these Labour mining MPs in Parliament in 1919, when reconstruction and unemployment must have been foremost in their minds, promoting a bill about gender equality. Indeed it may be seen as ironic, as later the same year they would be pushing for the passage of the Restoration of Pre-War Practices

²⁰ F W S Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966* (Chichester, Sussex: Political Reference Publications, 1970).

²¹ HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 c1561, William Adamson (1863-1936).

²² Beatrice Webb remarked in her diary, 'Out of the 59 Labour members, 25 are miners – for general political purposes dead stuff.' She also characterised Adamson as 'a middle-aged Scottish miner, typical British proletarian in body and mind, with an instinctive suspicion of all intellectuals or enthusiasts.' Beatrice Webb, *The diary of Beatrice Webb vol 3, 1905-1924, the power to alter things*, (London: Virago, 1984), pp329-330.

²³ M Stenton and S Lees, *Who's who of British members of Parliament* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976-1981).

²⁴ Pamela M Graves, *Labour women: women in British working-class politics, 1918-1939*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p95.

²⁵ Jon Lawrence, *Electing our masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Bill aimed in part at removing women workers from wartime industry.²⁶ Yet here they were introducing a bill which would allow middle-class women to become lawyers and accountants. It was, after all, their party policy. The Labour party's election manifesto had included a statement that 'the Labour Party *is* the Women's Party.'²⁷ Although Labour women were slow to become MPs, and labour and socialist women generally more sympathetic to class-based politics than gender-based politics, in only four years of recruitment between 1918 and 1922 100,000 women joined the women's sections of local Labour parties.²⁸ Presumably Labour hoped that removing the age restriction for women to vote would help the party. In this context the role of Labour in introducing the Women's Emancipation Bill becomes much more explicable. And even though it was to be replaced by the Sex Disqualification Act, Labour remained proud of its achievement in passing the Women's Emancipation Bill in the Commons, using it in leaflets as an example of its commitment to women's rights.²⁹

Opposition (lack of) to the Women's Emancipation Bill

The MPs who did oppose the extension of the franchise contained in the Women's Emancipation Bill did not do so on grounds of principle; instead they argued it was 'too soon' after the last extension of the franchise (the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave some women the vote at age 30); that time should not be spent on this when reconstruction and security of the nation were at stake; that if the bill was passed, a General Election should be held as soon as possible, which was undesirable given the amount of work to get through; and that such a measure should not be introduced through a private members' bill but rather by the government.³⁰

Several MPs had been members of the Speaker's Conference which had made the recommendations on the franchise implemented in 1918, and argued that the discussion had

²⁶ Gerry R Rubin, 'Law as a Bargaining Weapon: British Labour and the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act 1919', *Historical Journal* 32(4) 1989. Meta Zimmeck, "'Get out and get under": the impact of demobilisation on the Civil Service, 1918-1932' pp88-120 in Gregory Anderson, ed, *The White-Blouse revolution: female office workers since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

²⁷ Craig, *Manifestos*, p6.

²⁸ Graves, *Labour women*, p1.

²⁹ Parliamentary Archives [thereafter PA], LG/G/119.

³⁰ HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 c1572, Major O'Neill; c1594. Lt-Col W Guinness; c1609, J D Rees. O'Neill was supportive of the Women's Emancipation Bill but abstained from voting. Guinness voted for the bill.

been so thorough and the solution so difficult to reach, that they could not abandon it only one year later.³¹ Questions were asked why the voting age had been established at thirty, and the Speaker explained, 'It was thought desirable that women and men should be somewhere about on a parity and we took the age of thirty which was the nearest we could get to make the number of women voters equal to the number of men.'³² One MP argued that the Women's Emancipation Bill 'does not emancipate women... the Ladies Gallery is completely empty to-day which shows that they do not regard this Bill as an Emancipation bill in any sense of the word'— but C W Bellairs was in fact arguing that it did not go far enough, as it 'should apply to all ranks of industry.'³³ Another MP, Captain Elliot, felt the bill ought to be extended to apply to the military: 'If there was one class of women who were entitled above all others to the utmost honour we could possibly give it was our women doctors and nurses, especially on the Western Front.'³⁴ Elliot himself had been awarded the Military Cross, and he was to marry a nurse, Helen Arabella Hamilton, a few months later in August 1919.³⁵

Women and the law

Almost nothing was said in opposition to women becoming solicitors, barristers and Justices of the Peace; this was the least controversial part of the bill, at second reading and all later stages in both the Commons and the Lords. A Barristers and Solicitors (Qualification of Women) Bill introduced by Lord Buckmaster had passed the Lords with almost no opposition less than a month before, and similar bills had passed previously but come to nothing because of the war. Buckmaster had used arguments very similar to those expressed by supporters of the Women's Emancipation Bill, while reassuring the Lords that 'Nobody thinks that the passage of

³¹ Ibid c1575, Sir Ryland Adkins (Liberal). Adkins was otherwise very supportive of the Women's Emancipation Bill and did vote for it.

³² Ibid c1612, Mr Speaker (James Lowther, formerly Conservative).

³³ Ibid cc1587-1588, Commander Carlyon Bellairs (Conservative).

³⁴ Ibid c1616, Captain Elliot.

³⁵ The marriage was to be tragically brief as Helen died in a climbing accident on their honeymoon. His second wife, Katharine, whom he married in 1934, was one of the first women peers created in 1958 after his death. Gordon F Millar, 'Elliot, Walter Elliot (1888–1958)', *ODNB*.

this bill is going to flood the legal profession with women. It will enable a few women, who are peculiarly qualified, to earn an honourable living.³⁶

Similarly, a Justices of the Peace (Qualification of Women) Bill passed the House of Lords in 1919 while the Women's Emancipation Bill was going through the House of Commons. Again there was little opposition and arguments followed the same lines of women having proved themselves in the war and on bodies such as school boards. Additionally it was argued that women would be 'specially well qualified' to work in the new children's courts.³⁷ The Lord Chancellor, while reassuring the Lords that he would not create large numbers of women magistrates merely for the sake of it, gave government support. Although an amendment was passed at third reading to restrict the age of women magistrates to 30 and above, the Lord Chancellor opposed this restriction. 'If any such woman is able to satisfy not only the Advisory Committee but the Lord Lieutenant and the Lord Chancellor, she would be a rather remarkable young woman, and might conceivably be a valuable addition to the bench.'³⁸

In the end both the Barristers and Solicitors (Qualification of Women) Bill and the Justices of the Peace (Qualification of Women) Bill were rendered unnecessary by the passage of the Sex Disqualification Act, and neither reached the point of debate in the Commons. Subsequently, it was the job of the Lord Chancellor to decide if any women magistrates should be appointed. A memo explained, 'it is proper to signalise the passing of the Act by placing upon the Commission of the Peace a limited number of representative women who have distinguished themselves in the public service, or by exceptional private gifts.'³⁹ He set up a Women's Advisory Committee of seven women who were the earliest women JPs. They included Margaret, Marchioness of Crewe, wife of Robert Crewe-Milnes, former Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and Leader of the House of Lords; Edith Marchioness of Londonderry, known as a suffragist, for war work and later as a political hostess; Margaret Lloyd George, wife of the Prime Minister; social reformer Elizabeth Haldane, sister of Viscount Haldane; trade union

³⁶ HL Deb 11 Mar 1919 vol 33 c591, Lord Buckmaster (Liberal). Buckmaster was Lord Chancellor 1915-1916. Lord Birkenhead (Conservative), the current Lord Chancellor had weighed in with government support on the grounds of women's war work. Ibid c596, Lord Chancellor.

³⁷ HL Deb 20 May 1919 vol 34 c736, Earl Beauchamp (Liberal).

³⁸ Ibid cc738-739 and c1068, Lord Chancellor.

³⁹ PA, LG/F/4/7/43.

organiser Gertrude Tuckwell; the novelist (and formerly anti-suffragist) Mrs Humphrey Ward; and the Fabian leader, economist and social reformer Beatrice Webb.⁴⁰

The lack of controversy in debates on women magistrates during the Women's Emancipation Bill should not detract from the significance of its achievement as part of the Sex Disqualification Act. It abolished the obvious inequality that a woman mayor could not take up the ex officio position of JP as her male equivalent did, and Ada Summers, Mayor of Stalybridge, duly took up her position as the country's first woman JP on 31 December 1919.⁴¹ Before 1919, women had no role in court other than as defendant or witness. By 1948 there were more than 3,000 women magistrates, and although this was small compared to the number of men,⁴² the women took their duties seriously, pioneering modern ideas and contributing to a new quasi-professional approach to the role of JP. Logan compares it favourably to the 'extremely slow progress made by women in the legal profession, Parliament and judiciary.'⁴³ Although unpaid and voluntary, being a JP carried significant social prestige as a 'poor man's knighthood'. Indeed the idea of allowing women entry to 'the professions' such as law, is significant in that the word 'professional' in this period implied 'male', and carried connotations of higher social status and political citizenship.⁴⁴

Government support for the Women's Emancipation Bill

The Women's Emancipation Bill passed resoundingly on second reading with 119 votes to 32.⁴⁵ This was a major triumph for a private members' bill, which had to obtain 100 votes in favour to avoid closure.⁴⁶ Ray Strachey said that 'the Members of the House of Commons hardly

⁴⁰ The early women magistrates formed a careful geographical and political balance, and had many connections to the political and judicial elite. Anne Logan, 'Making women magistrates: feminism, citizenship and justice in England and Wales 1918-1950', (London: University of Greenwich, 2002), p150.

⁴¹ < <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/blueplaque/adasummers> > accessed 19 Mar 2012.

⁴² In 1948 there were 3,700 female and 13,100 male justices. *Report of the Royal Commission on Justices of the Peace 1946-48, 1947-48*, Cmd 7463, p6.

⁴³ Logan, 'Making women magistrates', pp172-277, p96.

⁴⁴ Anne Logan, 'Professionalism and the impact of England's first women justices, 1920-1950', pp833-850 in *Historical Journal* 49(3): 2006.

⁴⁵ HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 c1625-1628.

⁴⁶ Bromhead, *Private Members' Bills*, p105.

dared to vote against it, not knowing what their female constituents might have to say.'⁴⁷ The female constituents may well have had an effect; one MP stated 'I have received no end of letters from the constituency that I have the honour to represent, asking me to give my hearty support to this very important and essential measure'⁴⁸ – an excellent demonstration of lobbying paying off. However government resistance was not apparent; the only minister who spoke on the bill, Christopher Addison, President of the Local Government Board, voted in favour. Addison criticised the wording as well as opposing the franchise extension. However he voted for it on the understanding that the franchise clause would be deleted during the Committee stage and other clauses put 'in acceptable shape.'⁴⁹ This clearly was not what most other MPs wanted ('if you take the second Clause out of the Bill, you take the body away from it entirely',⁵⁰ declared Thomas Cape) but the fact remains that the government helped the bill through its second reading.

The Women's Emancipation Bill in the House of Commons – Committee stage: the government fails to take it seriously

The Women's Emancipation Bill was considered by Standing Committee E on 14 May 1919. There are unfortunately no debates recorded; the standing committee report is a purely formal record listing members and stating that the bill was passed without amendment.⁵¹ However the third reading debates on 4 July 1919 explain what happened at Committee stage. 'The President of the Local Government Board... had not the time to be present... No member of the Government at all was there.'⁵² Sir Kingsley Wood, the Parliamentary Private Secretary, was present, but 'What did he do? He did not raise any of those technical points in regard to the first and third Clauses... He might have done so with effect and many of us would have been quite willing to listen... He moved the excision of the second Clause [i.e. the franchise extension] which is really the gist of the bill... and the feeling of the Committee in favour was

⁴⁷ Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": a short history of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1928 (reprinted 1978)), p375.

⁴⁸ HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 c1591, Carter.

⁴⁹ Ibid c1626, Dr Christopher Addison (Liberal).

⁵⁰ Ibid c1612, Thomas Cape (Labour).

⁵¹ *Report from Standing Committee E, with proceedings*, HC 94 (1919). Standing committee debates were only recorded from 1919 and coverage was patchy at first.

⁵² HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 c1307, Lt-Col Sir Samuel Hoare (Conservative).

so strong that... their Amendment was rejected without a division'.⁵³ Senior Conservative party manager Sir Robert Sanders wrote in his diary, 'Addison muddled the matter all through. He actually sent Kingsley Wood to represent him in the Standing Committee and the Committee ignored him altogether'.⁵⁴ The President of the Board of Education apologised for the government, explaining 'very special difficulties'.⁵⁵ As *The Times* remarked, 'The Government have got into "a scrape" over this measure... the Labour Party are "one up"'.⁵⁶

The House was outraged, and question after question asked why had the government not done what they had agreed to do? The absence of ministers was regarded with scepticism: 'The Bill has been on the Order Paper a very long time'.⁵⁷ The argument that the bill was badly drafted came in for derision by Samuel Hoare and Lord Robert Cecil: 'It is almost impossible for a private Member with the facilities at his disposal to draft a Bill as well as a government draftsman... why did not the Government take steps to amend it in committee?'⁵⁸ 'It is the oldest excuse... It is the kind of excuse that cannot be accepted by any self-respecting House of Commons... Everyone knows that the Government can put right any defects in drafting in the other House.' Cecil also stressed that the committee system must be taken seriously by the government now that wartime was no longer an excuse for expediency: 'It is essential that the House should support the decisions of Grand Committee...I have been surprised at the extent to which what may be called the war mind still prevails in Government circles'.⁵⁹ Indeed some MPs saw the whole principle of private members' bills as endangered; 'Surely it is the duty of the Government to assist private Members in regard to legislation... [if not] then legislation by the private Member becomes a farce and the House is merely here to register the desires of the Government with the mechanical majority they have to support them'.⁶⁰

⁵³ Ibid c1301, William Thorne (Labour).

⁵⁴ Robert Sanders Bayford, *Real old Tory politics: the political diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, ed John Ramsden (London: Historian's Press, 1984). Entry for Wed 9 July 1919, p127. Kingsley Wood (Conservative) was only elected in 1918.

⁵⁵ Ibid c1342, President of the Board of Education (Herbert Fisher, Liberal).

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 17 May 1919.

⁵⁷ HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 c1326, Major Philip Lloyd-Greame (Conservative).

⁵⁸ Ibid c1307, Hoare.

⁵⁹ Ibid cc1336-8, Robert Cecil.

⁶⁰ Ibid c1321, Trevelyan Thomson (Liberal).

The Women's Emancipation Bill as a private members' bill

These are interesting points and it is worth considering how the experience of the Women's Emancipation Bill compares to other private members' bills. P A Bromhead's study of private members' bills in the first half of the 20th century clearly shows that before 1914 such bills were usually about big party political issues such as suffrage and Home Rule, and the main objectives were publicity, attention and discussion.⁶¹ The Women's Emancipation Bill is therefore a good example of the big political bill still being introduced just after the war, and some of the comments during debate demonstrate this: 'It would certainly do no harm to have a private Member's day discussing this.'⁶² Gradually through the 1920s and 1930s private members' bills became less and less controversial, as members came to use them as a serious method of getting legislation passed on minor reforms such as proposals for moral and social betterment (e.g. alcohol regulation, Sunday observance, animal welfare). These were areas where lobbying groups targeted MPs who obtained a high place on the private members' bill ballot. Although it was not impossible for a bill introducing major constitutional change to start as a private members' bill and be taken over by the government (Bromhead cites the Re-election of Ministers Act (1919) Amendment Act 1926), it would have been very unusual.

Regarding the lack of ministerial interest at committee stage, Bromhead says, 'The House has always expected the Minister concerned or his assistant to be present at least,' although junior ministers became more common in the inter-war period. As for government assistance with drafting, such a thing did sometimes happen if a bill was given a second reading, 'both by making available the expert advice of the parliamentary draftsmen, and by giving detailed political and administrative advice.'⁶³ The best example of this is Sir Alan Herbert's Matrimonial Causes Bill 1936-37, reforming divorce law. The government played a role as mediator, conciliator and adviser on matters of detail, and Herbert's bill duly passed. Although Herbert faced many bargains and compromises along the way for which the eventual Act was criticised, Sharon Redmayne concludes that 'What Herbert achieved was to make divorce law reform politically feasible', as the government would not adopt the issue itself under any

⁶¹ Bromhead, *Private Members' Bills*.

⁶² HC Deb 4 April 1919 vol 114 c1590, Major Cyril Entwistle (Liberal).

⁶³ Bromhead, *Private Members' Bills*, p127, p89, p108.

circumstances. A private members' bill was the only way forward in this case.⁶⁴ So as the Women's Emancipation Bill had passed its second reading, and as Addison had said that the government would seek to amend it in committee, it does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility for its supporters to have expected government participation at committee stage, even assistance with drafting. But the government did not find the time.

The Women's Emancipation Bill: the government gets round to looking at it

Two days after the bill had passed Committee stage on 14 May, the Women's Emancipation Bill finally made it onto the government agenda. It was discussed in the War Cabinet Committee of Home Affairs on 16 and 28 May 1919, as the government pondered the forthcoming third reading. Here the civil service showed its hand, expressing two major concerns; firstly about women working after marriage and secondly about women competing in open exams. Stanley Leathes (1st Commissioner, Civil Service Commission) said women 'should not enter on same terms as men.' Thomas Heath (Joint Permanent Secretary, Treasury) said the obligations were inconsistent with 'the normal duties of married life' and opposed clause 1 as 'it would thus be impossible to confine the Class I posts in any Department to men'. The opposition from the Post Office, which employed many women, was strongest: G E P Murray (Secretary, General Post Office) said that many women telephonists become less efficient with age so 'It was to the advantage of the service that they should be encouraged to marry'. The meetings concluded that they should reject the Women's Emancipation Bill at third reading and draft a completely new bill taking account of these objections.⁶⁵

'Resign, Resign!' The Women's Emancipation Bill in the House of Commons: government defeat

At the third reading of the Women's Emancipation Bill on 4 July 1919 the government finally weighed in against it with Major Astor, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, moving to delay as the government had decided to introduce its own bill instead. He explained that the government would maintain the clause about civil and judicial appointments with

⁶⁴ Sharon Redmayne, 'The Matrimonial Causes Act 1937: a lesson in the art of compromise', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 13(2) (1993), pp183-200.

⁶⁵ TNA, CAB 26/1. HAC 28 16/5/19 item 6 & HAC 30 28/5/19 item 4. Murray remained staunchly opposed to married women and older women working in the Post Office. Glew, 'Women's Employment in the General Post Office'.

some changes, but would drop the equal franchise clause.⁶⁶ Nineteen MPs spoke over 73 columns of debate. Again the speeches were almost entirely in favour of the Women's Emancipation Bill as it stood. The speeches returned to the principles of the bill, in particular the equal franchise clause. The government ministers present were insistent that their manifesto pledge to abolish inequality of the sexes did not commit them to further franchise reform, which various MPs disagreed with, including Philip Lloyd-Greame. 'To my mind and I believe that of nearly every voter in the country, that pledge, if it meant anything, meant that in the matter of the franchise women and men were going to be put on an equality.'⁶⁷ It is apparent that following the successful passage at second reading and committee stage, women's organisations had rallied to lobby MPs to support the bill at third reading. The papers of one MP, William Wedgwood Benn, who was very supportive of women's causes generally, show correspondence and circulars from at least four organisations (the WFL, the National Council of Women, the Independent Women's Social & Political Union and the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations). Indeed the WFL, acting on behalf of another 14 societies (including NUSEC) had sent out a 'Women's Societies Whip' letter on 30 June, with the request to be present and support the Women's Emancipation Bill on 4 July underlined three times.⁶⁸

Apart from government ministers, only five MPs spoke in favour of the government's position, and three of those made political points about the Pre-War Practices Bill also going through Parliament at that time, rather than speaking against the Women's Emancipation Bill per se (arguing it was hypocritical for Labour MPs to support the entry of women into the professions while denying them entry to industry).⁶⁹ Another MP supported the government position on the franchise.⁷⁰ But only one MP tackled the Women's Emancipation Bill as a whole: J D Rees poured scorn on the whole thing. 'Everyone knows to-day that it cannot become law... Under this Bill it might be the case that we might get some extremely capable lady as the Governor of a Province...' He mocked Adamson as 'the champion of the opposite sex on this occasion. I

⁶⁶ HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 cc1283-1285, Major Waldorf Astor (Conservative). A few months later, Astor's wife Nancy became the first woman MP to take her seat.

⁶⁷ Ibid c1344, Fisher; c1326, Lloyd-Greame.

⁶⁸ PA, ST/50.

⁶⁹ HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 c1295, Col Greig (Liberal); c1298, Captain Loseby; c1303, Commander Bellairs.

⁷⁰ Ibid c1311, John Campbell (Conservative).

congratulate him on the proud position, and he can impale a petticoat upon his lance'.⁷¹ J D Rees had previously spent 26 years working in the Indian civil service.⁷² He was therefore in a position to know what he was talking about with regard to women in the Indian administration, although he expressed it in a provocative manner.

However Rees stood alone, and was followed by Lord Robert Cecil who made an extremely impressive and detailed speech, the penultimate one in the debate, which must have influenced some MPs. Cecil systematically destroyed each of Rees' points and all other arguments that had been made against the bill, ridiculed the government's position and brought everything back to the fundamental points addressed by the bill. 'I say to the House it is vital for its good name in this country that it should take especial care not to play fast and loose with the pledges given to women.'⁷³ Lord Robert Cecil must have cut an influential figure; son of former Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, government minister during the war, in 1919 he was embarking upon his long career dedicated to the League of Nations which would win him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937.⁷⁴ The result was an unusual victory for a private members' bill in the face of government hostility.⁷⁵ Despite the votes of 19 government office holders and two whips, in the following division the government was defeated 100 to 85, amid calls of 'Resign, resign!' ⁷⁶

'My baby, torn to pieces' - the end of the Women's Emancipation Bill

The government did not resign, of course; Robert Sanders recorded, 'No one seemed to mind much and we went on with business as usual.'⁷⁷ Although the Women's Emancipation Bill had successfully passed the Commons, it then moved to the Lords; and now the government had its own rival bill. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Bill had its second reading on 22 July 1919 and the introductory speech by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Birkenhead, left peers in no doubt

⁷¹ Ibid c1331, J D Rees.

⁷² Stenton and Lees, *Who's who*.

⁷³ HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 c1340, Robert Cecil.

⁷⁴ Martin Ceadel, 'Cecil, Edgar Algernon Robert Gascoyne- [Lord Robert Cecil], Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (1864–1958)', *ODNB*.

⁷⁵ Bromhead, *Private Members' Bills*, p105.

⁷⁶ HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 c1345.

⁷⁷ Bayford, *Real old Tory politics*, p127. Entry for Wed 9 Jul 1919.

that it was intended to kill off the Women's Emancipation Bill, which was scheduled for its own second reading in the Lords two days later under the name of Lord Kimberley. The Lord Chancellor took the Women's Emancipation Bill and systematically rubbished it: 'It is drafted in a manner which... in my judgement is very unlikely to carry out what are the obvious intentions of the sponsors of the Bill'.⁷⁸ Lord Kimberley was clearly taken by surprise: 'I was not in the least prepared to hear my "baby" – my Bill – torn to pieces by the noble and learned Lord on the Woolsack tonight'. He tried to appeal, 'If he will only take my Bill on his hands now as well, he can put what amendments he may like into it,'⁷⁹ but to no avail. Kimberley did go ahead with the second reading of the Women's Emancipation Bill on 24 July, but the Lord Chancellor again demolished it,⁸⁰ and peers were persuaded that the best course now was to work with the government's own bill. The debate was brief, the Women's Emancipation Bill failed its second reading and its passage ended.

Ray Strachey's view of this was that 'the Peers had no constituents, and therefore they were not at all afraid, and they quashed this comprehensive bill with pleasure'.⁸¹ In fact the Lord Chancellor quashed it almost single-handedly. Lord Birkenhead was notorious for his antagonism to women's causes,⁸² but in this case it simply fell to him as the government representative in the Lords to do the job. The bill had supporters in the Lords in Kimberley, Haldane and Muir Mackenzie, and perhaps if it had still been the only such bill on the table they might have made progress; but by the time the Women's Emancipation Bill got to the Lords they had no chance against the government's rival bill.

⁷⁸ HL Deb 22 Jul 1919 vol 35 c892, Lord Chancellor.

⁷⁹ Ibid c901 and 903, Lord Kimberley. John Wodehouse, 2nd Earl of Kimberley, was initially a Liberal and joined the Labour Party 'after the First World War'. John Powell, 'Wodehouse, John, first earl of Kimberley (1826–1902)', *ODNB* (referring to the 2nd Earl). Kimberley was possibly the first Labour member of the House of Lords, although it is hard to date when the early Labour-supporting peers, such as Viscount Haldane and Lord Muir Mackenzie, changed their party affiliation to Labour. No Labour leader in the Lords was appointed until Haldane in 1924.

⁸⁰ HL Deb 24 Jul 1919 vol 35 c1047, Lord Chancellor.

⁸¹ Strachey, *The Cause*, p375.

⁸² Birkenhead (F E Smith) opposed women's suffrage before the war, although as Attorney-General he had to pilot the Representation of the People Bill 1918 through the Commons. As Lord Chancellor, he was responsible among other things for ending Viscountess Rhondda's attempt to take her seat in the House of Lords in 1922 (Sutherland, 'Peeresses, parliament and prejudice').

The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Bill: drafting & introduction to the House of Lords

The drafting of the Sex Disqualification Bill is important in showing the attitude of the government to the principles behind the Women's Emancipation Bill. As presented to the House of Lords and discussed in second reading on 22 July, the Sex Disqualification Bill had two clauses:

Clause 1 – a person would not be disqualified by sex [marriage was not mentioned] from exercising any public function, or from being appointed to any civil or judicial office, or entering any civil profession or vocation, or serving on juries, with two provisos:

Proviso a) on the civil service - regulations might be made by Orders in Council prescribing the mode of admission to the civil service;

Proviso b) on jury service- judges might at their discretion exempt a woman from jury service by reason of nature of evidence or issues.

Clause 2 – allowing peeresses in their own right to sit in the House of Lords.

Ray Strachey said 'In its first form this Bill did little more than open the legal profession to women'.⁸³ Whilst allowing for her disappointment in losing the Women's Emancipation Bill, this is a harsh judgement; in its first form the bill intended to open not only the legal profession, but other public offices, and jury service; and although the franchise clause had gone, the peeresses clause was still there.

Before this bill came to Parliament, earlier drafts had been made by the Lord Chancellor's Office and considered in the War Cabinet Committee of Home Affairs. Correspondence shows that Hugh Godley, Parliamentary Counsel, was very unsure about what the bill was intended to do. Early drafts show they left in 'or marriage' as in the Women's Emancipation Bill; these words were removed on the grounds that they might prevent enforcement of the marriage bar, which the government wished to retain. It is also interesting to see that the word 'ecclesiastical' was at one time included along with 'civil or judicial' posts, thus briefly opening up the possibility that the bill might have encompassed the Church and led to women clergy; but this word was quietly dropped.⁸⁴ One important addition during drafting was the specific

⁸³ Strachey, *The Cause*, p375.

⁸⁴ TNA, LCO 2/439. Correspondence and draft bills, May – June 1919. Suffragist and preacher Maude Royden launched a campaign in 1919 for the ordination of women with the League of the Church

mention of juries.⁸⁵ Godley realised this might be an issue, and the Attorney-General advised that if they were to allow women on juries it was necessary to mention this specifically, to repeal the Juries Act 1870. Edward Shortt (Home Secretary and a KC) remarked in the cabinet committee 'he did not like the idea, but if women were going to be judges there was no reason why they should not sit on juries.'⁸⁶ This addition is important because it shows the Women's Emancipation Bill as passed by the Commons, which did not explicitly mention juries, would not have allowed women to be jurors.

The franchise clause was completely removed, the Lord Chancellor declaring that ministers had 'no intention whatever of reopening the franchise questions which have been so recently settled and after such full discussion.'⁸⁷ Some peers tried to argue but most ignored this and concentrated on the two clauses in front of them. The Lord Chancellor anticipated that the peers would find the bill 'surprising, and to many extremely disagreeable', and clearly found the whole matter distasteful himself; as Viscount Bryce drily observed, 'the principal argument I understood him to advance was that although it was revolutionary and disagreeable to a large number of persons, it was not nearly so bad as the Bill standing in the name of Lord Kimberley.'⁸⁸ Most peers who spoke were in favour of allowing women entry to the professions and most of the debate and the hostile speeches were about peeresses. The Lord Chancellor made it clear that the peeresses clause was included for discussion purposes only, that the government whips would not be put on, and the Lords were therefore at liberty to reject 'so remarkable a reform', as unsurprisingly happened at committee stage without a division.⁸⁹ The arguments about women peers have been analysed fully elsewhere,⁹⁰ so this chapter will concentrate on the clause which remained, clause 1, allowing women entry to the professions and to serve on juries.

Militant (formerly Church League for Women's Suffrage). They obtained the backing of NUSEC and the National Council of Women in 1925. Sheila Fletcher, *Maude Royden: a life* (Basil Blackwell, 1989). The Church of England authorised the ordination of women priests in 1992.

⁸⁵ There had been calls for women to sit on juries from at least 1913. TNA, HO 45/13321. Thanks to Daniel J R Grey for this reference.

⁸⁶ TNA, CAB 26/1. HAC 32 26/6/19 item 4.

⁸⁷ HL Deb 22 Jul 1919 vol 35 c894, Lord Chancellor

⁸⁸ Ibid c903, Lord Kimberley; c896, Lord Chancellor; c899, Viscount Bryce (Liberal).

⁸⁹ Ibid c895, Lord Chancellor; 31 Jul 1919 vol 36 c133.

⁹⁰ Sutherland, 'Peeresses, parliament, and prejudice'.

Amending the bill in the House of Lords: admission to incorporated professional societies

Now that the Women's Emancipation Bill was dead, women lobbyists and the peers and MPs sympathetic to them switched their attention to attempting to amend the Sex Disqualification Bill according to their wishes. Some amendments were relatively straightforward and successful, for example the inclusion of a phrase to ensure the admittance of women to incorporated professional societies, which was the result of lobbying by the Society of Accountants and the Faculty of Actuaries in Edinburgh,⁹¹ and added to bill at Committee stage. This was a good victory for the pressure groups and made a real difference to women wishing to become accountants. Mary Harris Smith had been refused entry to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 1891 and 1899; she was finally accepted in 1919 at the age of 72.⁹² The Council of the Institute of Accountants and Actuaries in Glasgow (IAAG) had recommended admittance of women to their membership but lost a vote on it on 15 October 1919, largely because of the opposition of younger members resuming their profession after years in the army who did not want competition from women; the Sex Disqualification Act rendered this opposition irrelevant. As a direct result, the indenture of Isobel Clyne Guthrie was accepted by the IAAG in January 1920, backdated to 1915 (when she had first been presented to the Council), and after passing the examinations she was admitted to the IAAG in 1924. Forty women were admitted to accountancy indentures in Scotland over the next ten years.⁹³

As well as accountants, this amendment affected women in other professions. Many professions were controlled by governing bodies of older and more conservative men who were not comfortable with the prospect of women members, some of whom resisted right up until 1919.⁹⁴ Hertha Ayrton, the famous mathematician and physicist (and suffragette), had notoriously been refused admission to the Royal Society in 1902 on the grounds they could not

⁹¹ TNA, LCO 2/439. Letter from James Watt, 21 Jul 1919.

⁹² Kate Murphy, *Firsts: the Livewire book of British women achievers* (London, Women's Press, 1990).

⁹³ Ken Shackleton, *Female entry to public accounting in Scotland, 1900-1930: the impact of the sex disqualification (removal) act 1919*. The second Asian Pacific interdisciplinary research in accounting conference, Osaka, Japan, 1998.

⁹⁴ Richard Symonds, *Inside the Citadel: Men and the Emancipation of Women, 1850-1920* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp161-175. Symonds identifies some professional bodies that allowed women to be members before 1919 including the Royal Pharmaceutical Society from 1878; Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) from 1898; Royal College of Surgeons from 1913; and the Royal Academy from 1880 (in theory - no women were elected until 1922). In each case this was due to the persistence of individual women and the assistance of a few sympathetic men, in the teeth of opposition.

legally admit a married woman. In 1922 the Royal Society admitted that because of the Sex Disqualification Act, this was no longer the case. Unfortunately this came too late for Hertha Ayrton, as by 1919 almost all her nominators had died, but the principle had been conceded; the first women to gain admission to the Royal Society were Kathleen Lonsdale and Marjory Stephenson in 1944.⁹⁵ In 1922 Annie Swynnerton became the first woman to be elected to associateship of the Royal Society of Arts;⁹⁶ Beatrice Webb became the first woman fellow of the British Academy in 1931;⁹⁷ and in 1936 came the first women Royal Academician, Dame Laura Knight,⁹⁸ although few further women were admitted by these institutions for a long time. Also, the wording 'incorporated professional societies' did not cover all the organisations it might. A letter from Hugh Godley records that the word 'incorporated' was 'necessary to avoid admitting women to the Athenaeum!'⁹⁹ and it was rightly pointed out in Parliament at the House of Commons committee stage that there was nothing to stop societies systematically blackballing women proposed as members.¹⁰⁰ But despite sympathy for the sentiment, no wording could be found to prevent such an event; regulation of private clubs is still controversial today. Women were not admitted as members to the Athenaeum until 2002.¹⁰¹

The significance of proviso (a) on the marriage bar and the Indian civil service

The main concern expressed by reformers at the Lords second reading was about proviso (a), which said that regulations could be made by Orders in Council. In effect, the power to have regulations enabled authorities to maintain the marriage bar and to bar women from parts of the civil service deemed unsuitable, the one most often mentioned being the Indian civil

⁹⁵ Joan Mason, 'The Admission of the First Women to the Royal Society of London', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 46(2). 1992.

⁹⁶ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, 'Swynnerton, Annie Louisa (1844–1933)', *ODNB*.

⁹⁷ < http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2012/International_Womens_Day.cfm > accessed 22 Mar 2012.

⁹⁸ Janet Dunbar, 'Knight, Dame Laura (1877–1970)', *ODNB*.

⁹⁹ TNA, LCO 2/439. 25 Jul 1919.

¹⁰⁰ HC Deb 27 Oct 1919 vol 120 c396, Sir Martin Conway (Conservative).

¹⁰¹ The first woman to be admitted was Baroness Greenfield in January 2002.
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/jan/03/highereducation.news>>, accessed 19 Mar 2012.
She became the first Director of the Royal Institution in 1998.

service.¹⁰² A few days after the second reading, Austen Chamberlain (then Chancellor of the Exchequer) wrote to the Lord Chancellor stressing that the House of Lords should not omit or alter proviso (a). He wrote that the marriage rule is 'in the interests of the women and their children as well as of the Service' and women passing the High Division exams might choose the Foreign Office.¹⁰³ Chamberlain also quoted the findings of the Gladstone Committee that women were not equal to this standard. The Gladstone Committee was the committee on the recruitment for the civil service after the war, chaired by Herbert Gladstone with a membership largely comprising of the heads of civil service departments.¹⁰⁴ Its findings stressed the distinction between clerical work (mechanical work such as typing, deemed suitable for women) and administrative work (intellectual, deemed suitable for men) in a 'separate spheres' scheme much opposed by women's groups. Major Astor as government spokesman in the House of Commons stated, 'Generally speaking we propose to adopt the recommendation of what is called the Gladstone Committee',¹⁰⁵ although this was later denied,¹⁰⁶ so the extent to which its recommendations were adopted by the government was unclear.

The Lord Chancellor made it clear from the start that the Sex Disqualification Bill was not intended to remove the marriage bar.¹⁰⁷ In committee stage on 31 July Lord Muir Mackenzie attempted to introduce an amendment to remove proviso (a), but the Lord Chancellor would not accept it. 'I cannot conceive that anyone would desire to alter a practice which is evidently in the interests of women and their children, as well as of the Service', and as for the possibility of women choosing the Foreign Service, there would be 'the extreme difficulty (I put it very mildly) under existing circumstances of sending women as Ministers and Ambassadors – and

¹⁰² HL Deb 22 Jul 1919 vol 35 c897, Viscount Haldane; c906, Lord Muir Mackenzie (Liberal). The Indian Civil Service dealt with populations 'so diverse in their habits, their religions, their codes of morality and their social standards' it was not thought women could govern it. HL Deb 04 August 1919 vol 36 c266. Lord Chancellor.

¹⁰³ TNA LCO 2/439. Letter dated 25 Jul 1919.

¹⁰⁴ *Final Report of the Committee appointed to consider and make recommendations upon certain questions with regard to recruitment for the Civil Service after the War*, Cmd 164, XI.191 (1919).

¹⁰⁵ HC Deb 4 Jul 1919 vol 117 c1284, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health (Major Astor).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 28 Oct 1919 c625, Sir Ernest Pollock, Solicitor General.

¹⁰⁷ HL Deb 22 Jul 1919 vol 35 c893, Lord Chancellor.

indeed to many of the other appointments – abroad.¹⁰⁸ The Lord Chancellor was throughout the driving force in getting the bill through the Lords in the form the government wished.

Viscount Haldane tried again at the report stage on 4 August to delete proviso (a), stating of course, nobody would wish to appoint women to positions in India, but 'the Bill goes unpleasantly further' in going against the general principle of admitting women to the higher civil service at all. The Lord Chancellor swatted this down again: it would be 'disastrous' to allow the possibility of women running the civil service in India; nobody would seriously argue that women should continue in the civil service on marriage; and 'you can only deal with this and many other matters of the same kind by Regulation'. Some were more far-sighted: Lord Emmott said, 'I much doubt whether the opinion of the public in years to come will be that on marriage women must necessarily retire from the civil service,'¹⁰⁹ but ultimately left it to the House of Commons to consider further. By this time it had been arranged for a deputation of women to meet the Lord Chancellor and Bonar Law, the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, and several Lords expressed the hope that a modification of wording could then be found.

The deputation of women

Pippa Strachey, on behalf of the London Society for Women's Service and other women's societies, wrote to the Lord Chancellor and Bonar Law on 29 July 1919 requesting that they receive a deputation on proviso (a).¹¹⁰ The deputation was received on 11 August, and it strongly expressed its support for Lord Robert Cecil's proposed amendment to proviso (a), which would have Orders in Council published in the Gazette and laid before Parliament and therefore open to scrutiny. A note on the deputation by the London Society for Women's Service outlines what happened.¹¹¹ The deputation was introduced by Graham Wallas (a Fabian and political scientist, particularly interested in reform of the civil service, education and women's rights) who spoke against adoption of the Gladstone Committee

¹⁰⁸ HL Deb 31 Jul 1919 vol 36 c126, Lord Chancellor.

¹⁰⁹ HL Deb 4 Aug 1919 vol 36 c266, Viscount Haldane; c267-8, Lord Chancellor; c268, Lord Emmott (Liberal). The subsequent deputation included his wife, Lady Emmott, for the National Council of Women. Lady Mary Gertrude Emmott was also an early woman Justice of the Peace, and Chair of the Ministry of Reconstruction's Women's Subcommittee Advisory Council.

¹¹⁰ PA, BL/97/5/26 .

¹¹¹ PA, BL/98/1/9. See Appendix 2 for full list of bodies represented.

recommendations. Then five women spoke. Emily Penrose (Principal of Somerville College Oxford, for the Federation of University Women) said that good university women would be suspicious of the Gladstone Committee's methods, 'suspecting that "suitable for women" might be a polite paraphrase for "a dull billet"', and Edith Major (Head Mistress of King Edward VI High School for Girls in Birmingham, for the Head Mistresses' Association) said she would be 'unable to convince really able girls to enter a Service in which they have no clear prospects of future initiative and responsibility'. Ray Strachey, Lady Emmott and Olive King also spoke.

Unfortunately at this point (having claimed they did not wish to put the Gladstone Committee recommendations into effect, but merely to give the government some discretion), the Lord Chancellor and Bonar Law left, leaving three further women unable to make their points; the implication that listening to the deputation was not a high priority for them is unmistakable. The note on the deputation expressed the representatives' unanimous opinion on the marriage bar: 'the automatic dismissal of women from the Civil Service on marriage is a serious mistake in the interests of public efficiency'. It also said that the Treasury had been acting on the Gladstone committee recommendation for months, and this practice should cease at once. The strong representation on the deputation of women from civil service organisations (nine of the 14 bodies represented) is particularly relevant, as when discussing women's efforts to improve the Sex Disqualification bill in *The Cause*, Ray Strachey is categorical about the opposition not of MPs, nor even of the government, but of the civil service. 'The Civil Service machine seemed absolutely determined not to allow women to come into any but the routine and subordinate grades.'¹¹²

The Sex Disqualification Bill in the House of Commons

The bill finished in the House of Lords on 4 August 1919 and moved on to the House of Commons. It had its second reading on 14 August, but there was no debate, the government presumably taking the position that it was not necessary given the extensive second reading debate on the Women's Emancipation Bill, but doubtless also wishing to evade the comments of the backbenchers who had passed yet lost the Women's Emancipation Bill. The bill was supposed to move directly on to committee stage, but fell victim to government delaying tactics; as *The Vote* bitterly recorded, MPs were encouraged 'not to curtail their eloquence' on the Land Settlement (Scotland) bill beforehand, and then time was unexpectedly given to the Welsh Church bill. When this was challenged, the government won a division by 55 votes to

¹¹² Strachey, *The Cause*, p376.

34, the government benches having been 'filled up with MPs who had not previously been present, including even the prime minister.'¹¹³ The London Society for Women's Service recorded 'protests from all parts of the House.'¹¹⁴ *The Times* reported 'The fact the Government passed over their own Sex Disqualification (Removal) bill yesterday is affording mingled wrath and amusement to the women concerned.' It went on to quote Ray Strachey: "'Once again, by means of Parliamentary chicanery, the Government's pledge to women has been put off and in all probability broken... a chapter of mistakes ending today with a cowardly defeat and a final discreditable blunder.'"¹¹⁵ The women were worried at this point that the bill might be abandoned altogether. Pippa Strachey wrote on 15 August, 'It appears at the time of writing that the Govt rather than face the danger of having the Bill amended in the sense advocated by last Monday's deputation, will shelve it until next Session.'¹¹⁶

However it was not shelved, and next came for detailed consideration in the Commons at Committee stage on 27 October 1919. Again, some amendments were made with little controversy and almost no debate, such as a clause allowing women to qualify as solicitors in three years rather than five if they already possessed a university degree or equivalent (putting them on the same footing as men). There was also a clause stating that universities had the power to admit women to membership or degrees,¹¹⁷ which was indeed worth adding as Oxford admitted women to degrees within a year, in 1920.¹¹⁸ Vera Brittain, an undergraduate at Oxford, describes the significance of this in her *Testament of Youth*; giving full credit to the Sex Disqualification Act with its 'comprehensive opening words'. She excitedly wrote to her mother "'when I do my Finals I shall also get my Degree and you will see me going about in a mortar-board and gown.'" She described the gowns and caps as 'the visible signs of a profound revolution.'¹¹⁹

¹¹³ *The Vote*, 22 Aug 1919. PA, ST/50.

¹¹⁴ WL, 2LSW/A/4/1/3/2. Minutes 17 Sep 1919.

¹¹⁵ *The Times*, 16 Aug 1919.

¹¹⁶ WL, 6APC/2/06. Pippa Strachey to Miss Caldcleugh, Association of Post Office Women Clerks.

¹¹⁷ HC Deb 27 Oct 1919 vol 120 c394 and c398. Major Hills was responsible for these clauses.

¹¹⁸ Mary Turner, *The women's century: a celebration of changing roles 1900-2000* (Kew: National Archives, 2003).

¹¹⁹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of youth: an autobiographical study of the years 1900-1925* (London: Virago, 2004), pp504-508.

'Sex or marriage': the marriage bar

There was more debate on other issues including the marriage bar, proviso (a) which allowed the government to make regulations, on mixed juries and women peers. One symbolically important amendment regarding the entry of women to the professions was introduced by Major Hills to insert the words 'or marriage', so that opening words of the bill were 'A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage'. This point was resurrected from the Women's Emancipation Bill, and it was clear from the debate that Hills intended to remove the marriage bar: 'As long as the woman serves the State properly she ought to be entitled to carry on her work after marriage... All the women's organisations, who certainly have got the interests of women and children deeply at heart, support the removal of this bar.' The government supported the amendment, although the Solicitor General, Sir Ernest Pollock, made it clear that regulations would be made that women should retire on marriage. Pollock's words show that, although he was content to have the words 'and marriage' added ('any post that is opened by clause 1 should be open in spite of marriage'), this was only because of the existence of proviso (a) which allowed the government discretion.¹²⁰

The marriage bar remained a thorn in the side of women's organisations for many years after the passage of the Sex Disqualification Act. In many professions it remained or became the norm for women to resign on marriage. Alison Oram's study of women teachers,¹²¹ and Helen Glew's study of women Post Office workers,¹²² have shown how this was a major problem for some women. There was some success in removing the bar at regional level, for example the London County Council imposed a bar in 1923 which after years of agitation was finally removed in 1935.¹²³ But attempts at national level to remove the bar were largely unsuccessful, as attempts to cite the Sex Disqualification Act in court cases failed. 'Despite its broad wording the courts held that the introduction of a marriage bar did not contravene the Act's provisions.'¹²⁴ The existence of the marriage bar in the civil service until 1946 was a major criticism of the Sex Disqualification Act by feminist organisations such as the Six Point Group,

¹²⁰ HC Deb 27 Oct 1919 vol 120 cc344-5, Major Hills; c347, Solicitor General.

¹²¹ Oram, *Women teachers*.

¹²² Helen Glew, 'Women's Employment in the General Post Office, 1914-1939' (London, Institute of Historical Research, PhD, 2010).

¹²³ Oram, *Women teachers*, p167, pp170-171.

¹²⁴ Susan Atkins and Brenda M Hoggett, *Women and the law* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p17.

and by historians since. Yet it is difficult to see what else could have been done in 1919.

Neither the Women's Emancipation Bill nor the Sex Disqualification Act were drafted in terms that explicitly gave married women the right to work. Hills had managed to get the 'or marriage' incorporated into the Sex Disqualification Bill and at the time that seemed enough.

Amending Proviso (a)

Another crucial amendment was that supported by the deputation of women. It was introduced by Samuel Hoare on behalf of Lord Robert Cecil (who was ill) and it altered proviso (a), so that any Orders in Council would only concern appointments connected with India and the Overseas Dominions (i.e. not the home civil service), and would be laid in draft before Parliament for 30 days to allow scrutiny by Parliament. Hoare made specific reference to the impact of lobbyists: 'Practically every women's organisation that represents professional women is in favour of these restrictions... being removed.'¹²⁵ A letter from Pippa Strachey to MPs dated 25 October 1919 reads: 'We are writing to ask you for your active help re the Sex Disqualification Bill. The Bill urgently needs amendment... we are very anxious about this amendment which is to us of the utmost importance.'¹²⁶

In the House of Commons committee Hoare argued, 'bureaucrats will set their faces against the free admission of women into Government administration... If we leave the matter to Orders in Council... I am confident they will hedge those conditions around with every kind of restriction.' He also referred to the successful Commons passage of the lost Women's Emancipation Bill. 'I ask this Committee not to allow its decision, three times given a few months ago, to be stultified by action in another place [the House of Lords] and not to allow this measure to be made ineffective by bureaucrats in Whitehall'.¹²⁷ In the resulting discussion Major O'Neill cited the example of a Mrs Dickie, a National Insurance Commissioner for Ireland, who despite being 'universally acknowledged to be one of the leading women Civil Servants in the United Kingdom' could not be employed permanently or given the same

¹²⁵ HC Deb 27 Oct 1919 vol 120 c361, Hoare.

¹²⁶ WL, 6/JCS/A/1. Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service papers (her emphasis).

¹²⁷ HC Deb 27 October 1919 vol 120 cc361-4, Hoare.

pension as her fellow male workers because she was married, even though there was 'no question of child birth or anything of that sort.'¹²⁸

The Solicitor General opposed the amendment, arguing for the need for some discrimination, citing recommendations of the Gladstone Committee earlier that year on women's employment. On marriage, 'in the interests of the State it is right and proper that married women should bear children'. A long and detailed speech by Major Hills refuted these arguments. He pointed out 'in every case in which the Solicitor General has nominally acted in the interests of women, he was restricting their entry into the Civil Service', stating that higher paid posts would continue to be reserved to men, citing examples of women already employed in high positions in the Foreign Office, and reiterating women wanted not special treatment but equality. He slated 'the extremely inept machinery of Orders in Council', and finally stated that unless the amendment was accepted, 'women would rather have no bill at all'. The Solicitor General grumbled 'I cannot believe that the women could be so unreasonable,'¹²⁹ and got his way; the amendment was lost 189 to 101. Dismayed by his remarks about the Gladstone Committee, women's organisations did at least manage to persuade the Solicitor General to 'definitely state' in the House that the Gladstone Committee recommendations were not to be acted on,¹³⁰ which he duly did at the report stage¹³¹ - a small victory for the women, even though the promise was not necessarily borne out in future years.

The civil service: the subsequent effect of proviso (a)

Dorothy Evans wrote in 1934, 'the seeming gains of the first clause were almost completely nullified by the innocuous looking but all significant proviso.'¹³² A number of Orders in Council were made under the proviso, including the one feared by the deputation of women. On 22 July 1920, the Civil Service Commissioners were given power to make regulations 'providing for and prescribing the mode of the admission of women to the civil service, and regulations reserving to men any branch of or posts in the civil service in any of His Majesty's possessions

¹²⁸ Ibid cc365-6, Major O'Neill. O'Neill was another lawyer; he went on to have a Parliamentary career long enough to end as Father of the House of Commons, the MP with the longest continuous service.

¹²⁹ Ibid c369, Solicitor General; cc374-7, Major Hills; c378, Solicitor General.

¹³⁰ WL, 6APC/2/06. Report of joint committee on civil service, in papers of the Association of Post Office Women Clerks.

¹³¹ HC Deb 28 Oct 1919 vol 120 c625, Solicitor General.

¹³² Dorothy Evans, *Women and the Civil Service* (London, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd, 1934), p31.

overseas, or in any foreign country', and the Treasury were given power to make regulations 'with respect to the conditions on which women admitted to the Civil Service of His Majesty may be appointed to or continue to hold posts therein.'¹³³ Further regulations followed in 1921 reserving to men 'all posts in the Diplomatic Consular Services and posts in the Colonies and Protectorates, and India, and Commercial Diplomatic Service... other than ones for which women were specially recruited.'¹³⁴

Various MPs kept the pressure on in Parliament with a deluge of questions during 1920-1921, many requesting a debate on women in the civil service. Major Hills was foremost among these. Hills, a lawyer and a Conservative Unionist MP, was a loyal friend to women's organisations. From 1917 he had chaired the Ministry of Reconstruction's Women's Employment Committee, advising on opportunities and conditions for women's employment after the War. This committee, composed of half men and half women, reported in 1919 and its recommendations included encouragement of women's trade unionism, training and welfare, improved conditions in factories and shops, regulation of wages and mother's pensions – although it stopped short of encouraging the employment of married women.¹³⁵ In 1920, Major Hills had a remarkable achievement when he managed to have a motion debated and passed without a division in favour of equality of opportunity and equal pay in all branches of the civil service and under all local authorities.¹³⁶ A note in the Treasury file illustrates the pressure he was under from both sides - to drop the matter from the government, to keep going from the women's lobbying organisations.¹³⁷ After months of effort, Hills and like-minded MPs achieved another House of Commons debate on women and the civil service on 5 August 1921, and although no headway was made on equal pay or the marriage bar, they managed to obtain agreement on a single establishment of both male and female staff with equality of authority and status, and equality of entrance in three years.¹³⁸ Although Hills took

¹³³ *London Gazette* 3 Aug 1920 pp8082-8083.

¹³⁴ Women remained barred from the Foreign Service until 1946. Helen McCarthy, 'Petticoat Diplomacy: The Admission of Women to the British Foreign Service, 1919-1946' pp285-321 in *Twentieth Century British History* 20(3): 2009.

¹³⁵ Ministry of Reconstruction. *Report of the Women's Employment Committee*, Cd 9239 (1919).

¹³⁶ HC Deb 19 May 1920 vol 129 cc1539-1580.

¹³⁷ TNA T 162/550, file 3754/05/1 & 2.

¹³⁸ HC Deb 5 Aug 1921 vol 145 cc1890-1947. Prominent among the supporters of Hills was former opponent of women's suffrage H H Asquith, at which Nancy Astor (Conservative) quoted, "'There is

a certain amount of criticism in the House for accepting government amendments to his motion without forcing them to a division,¹³⁹ he was supported by other supporters of women's rights including Lord Robert Cecil, and the outcome was seen as a success at the time by women's organisations including the Federation of Women Civil Servants and the Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service. The latter arranged a celebration dinner in the House of Commons on 18 August 1920.¹⁴⁰

The battle for women's equality within the civil service continued throughout and beyond the inter-war period. The principle of equal pay was not achieved until 1954. In the debate that initiated this on 16 May 1952 Charles Pannell reminded the Commons that it was thirty-two years since Hills' original motion was passed.¹⁴¹ The weight given to the claims of ex-servicemen combined with the marriage bar, reservation of posts, mechanisms of recruitment, and reorganisation of grades, all worked to limit the opportunities for women in the inter-war period. Meta Zimmeck goes so far as to say, 'it might be argued their [women's] position was appreciably less advantageous than it had been before 1914.'¹⁴² Cases illustrate how the government, aided and advised by civil servants, was able to circumvent the Act when it wanted.¹⁴³

Yet from 1922 women were admitted to the Administrative Class (1st Division) by examination for the first time. The first exams were held in October, whereupon a limited number of women were appointed direct to Administrative, Executive and Higher Clerical classes. An open exam for entry to the Administrative class was held in August 1925 at which men and women were allowed to compete on equal terms for the first time; a similar exam was held in

more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety nine just persons that need no repentance"', c1923.

¹³⁹ For example by Major Entwistle. Ibid c1942.

¹⁴⁰ WL, 6/JCS/A/1. Minutes 11 Aug 1921. Hills was received at the meeting with an ovation.

¹⁴¹ HC Deb 16 May 1952 vol 500 c1766, Charles Pannell (Labour). This connection was noted in Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: an account of women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967), p184. Pannell refers to Major Hills' motion passed in the Commons on 19 May 1920.

¹⁴² Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems'; Meta Zimmeck, 'The "new woman" in the machinery of government: a spanner in the works?', pp185-202 in Roy MacLeod, ed, *Government and Expertise: specialists, administrators and professionals 1860-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁴³ For example, TNA, LAB 2/1804/S&E556/1938/PartI&II.

1926, and 'In both years the women were appointed as Assistant Principal.'¹⁴⁴ These were important steps which would surely have been impossible before the Sex Disqualification Act. It can be argued that the civil service was merely 'ceding a corner' to women, and that their numbers remained small – 43 women were in the administrative grade in 1939, just 3% of the total.¹⁴⁵ Yet women's participation in the civil service overall remained steady;¹⁴⁶ the Administrative class, the top of the civil service in this period, was small, which Zimmeck compares to a gentleman's club;¹⁴⁷ it was always going to take time for women to enter such a club in significant numbers.

'I cannot imagine anything more awful': Mixed juries

Another amendment to the Sex Disqualification Act proposed by Hills was to omit the proviso that there could be single sex juries, on the grounds that horrible cases were 'equally horrible to men.' Some MPs were mortified: 'I cannot image anything more awful for a judge... than to have to deal with a jury wholly of women or partly of men and partly of women'. Hume-Williams (a QC) was concerned not only about cases of rape but also about commercial disputes, where women 'ought not to serve because they lack commercial experience', and divorce cases, where a woman 'might allow her judgment in dealing with another woman to be warped'. Other MPs condemned this 'Victorian attitude', mentioning the worldly experiences of women 'who are the shame of our streets' and nurses, but the amendment was withdrawn after Pollock assured the committee that 'In the ordinary course they [juries] should be mixed'.¹⁴⁸

Issues concerning women jurors were raised as soon as the Act was passed. The Lord Chief Justice wrote to Claud Schuster (Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor) that he did not

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems', pp921-922. The progress of women candidates by competition in the interwar period is traced by Evans, *Women and the Civil Service*, pp44-46, and Hilda Martindale, *Women servants of the state 1870-1938: a history of women in the civil service* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1938), pp104-111. Evans concludes, 'By the end of 1928 it will be seen that practical effect had been given to the proposal to admit women to the main common grades of the Service by the same regulations as prescribed the admission of men.'

¹⁴⁶ Zimmeck, 'Strategies and stratagems', p916.

¹⁴⁷ Zimmeck, 'The "new woman" in the machinery of government'.

¹⁴⁸ HC Deb 27 Oct 1919 vol 120 c383, Major Hills; cc384-5, Sir E Hume-Williams; c387, Captain Elliot; c389, Solicitor General.

know what criteria judges would apply in selecting women, remarking 'There will certainly be a strong movement among feminists to have women guilty of infanticide and similar offences tried by women. They will probably at first at any rate acquit on the grounds that "the man" ought to have been in the dock as well!' His note outlining issues included the statement, 'Summoning officers will find the summoning of women a very troublesome matter' because of medical exemptions, the nature of evidence and issues, and 'cases are likely to be more frequent of one of the Jury falling ill'. 'Minor points' included lavatory accommodation and arrangements for mixed juries in murder cases locked up for the night.¹⁴⁹ Schuster encouraged a joint sub-committee of the Supreme Court Committee (Lord Chancellor) and the Committee under Indictments Act (Lord Chief Justice) to draft rules for the selection of women jurors. Before this was done, Schuster had to deal with various impatient correspondents including local Clerks of the Peace wanting to know what they should do – should they summon women, and if so under what procedure? Pressure was also coming from women lobbyists, as illustrated by an undated note in the file which reads: 'Interview with Miss Normanton. A number of women societies meeting in spring. If no rules are published by then and if no public statement is made as to what the situation is, we shall be bombarded with resolutions.'¹⁵⁰ Helena Normanton was to become the first woman barrister to practice in 1922, thanks of course to the Sex Disqualification Act.

Rules were produced by February 1920, Schuster remarking in a letter to the Solicitor-General on 23 March that this had been done with great difficulty as, 'the Judges did not like either the Rules or the Act'. The rules were then finally issued by the Lord Chancellor's Office on 12 July 1920,¹⁵¹ decreeing amongst other things that women would get a notice with their jury summons that they could apply for exemption 'on account of pregnancy or other feminine condition or ailment'; that the Under-Sheriff might then exempt such a woman at their discretion; and that an application to have a jury of all men or all women could be made to the judge one day before hearing, or at the trial if necessary. This last was the crucial rule that allowed single-sex juries, and was opposed by women's organisations from the start. The NUSEC Annual report for 1919 includes actions firstly to promote legislation to make wives of men eligible for jury service also eligible, and secondly 'to repeal the provision that makes it

¹⁴⁹ TNA, LCO 2/559. Letter 9 Dec 1919.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, LCO 2/559 (her emphasis).

¹⁵¹ *Stat Rules & Orders* 1920 no 1978 L.51. Rules of the Supreme Court (Women Jurors) 1920.

possible for a judge to decide that a case in which both sexes are concerned shall be heard by a jury or women only or of men only.¹⁵² Cases where women were excluded were widespread. Indeed Anne Logan has found examples of female magistrates in the inter-war period being excluded from the bench, for example during cases of sexual assault, although women magistrates were more likely to encounter condescension than hostility.¹⁵³ Women magistrates were often able to resist such pressure; women jurors could not. The courts' discretionary right to exclude women from juries continued until 1972.¹⁵⁴

The Commons also amended the bill so as to include the right of peeresses to sit in the House of Lords; this was won at a division,¹⁵⁵ but removed by the Lords subsequently.¹⁵⁶ The Commons did not press the Lords any further on the peeresses issue.¹⁵⁷ Duncan Sutherland explains that the Commons 'decided to avoid a drawn-out quarrel, and acquiesced'.¹⁵⁸ Time was very short now and the whole bill could have been lost if the Commons had chosen to argue further. As it was, the bill received Royal Assent on 23 December 1919, the last day of the Parliamentary session.¹⁵⁹

What did women's organisations make of it at the time?

Harold Smith states that the Women's Emancipation Bill had the 'enthusiastic support of feminist groups', while the Sex Disqualification bill was 'opposed' by feminist groups 'who made vigorous attempts to have it amended'.¹⁶⁰ As evidence for this he cites a memorandum

¹⁵² WL, 2NSE/C/02, p.21. The 'somewhat archaic' eligibility rules for juries were householders assessed to the Poor Rate at not less than £30 in London and Middlesex, or £20 elsewhere; residents with £10 a year in real estate or rent charge, or £20 in leasehold for not less than 21 years; or burgesses in certain boroughs. This excluded the majority of married women living with their husbands. Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice*, p87.

¹⁵³ Logan, 'Making women magistrates', p196.

¹⁵⁴ Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice*, pp88-95.

¹⁵⁵ HC Deb 27 Oct 1919 vol 120 cc853-4.

¹⁵⁶ HL Deb 11 Nov 1919 vol 37 c181.

¹⁵⁷ HC Deb 26 Nov 1919 vol 121 c843.

¹⁵⁸ Sutherland, 'Peeresses, parliament and prejudice', p136.

¹⁵⁹ *Journal of the House of Commons* 1919, p428.

¹⁶⁰ Harold L Smith, 'Sex versus Class: British Feminists and the Labour Movement 1919-1929', *The Historian* 47, 1984, p19.

in the Lloyd George papers describing the withdrawal of the Women's Emancipation Bill as the 'first great blow' to the women of the country. The memorandum does say this, but only with regard to the failure to extend the franchise, so it is not actually a comment on the achievements of the Sex Disqualification Act.¹⁶¹

Smith also cites the NUSEC Annual Report for 1919, and states, 'Ray Strachey warned feminists that the Sex Disqualification bill was a trap, but her efforts to have it amended were not successful.'¹⁶² It is of course true that NUSEC enthusiastically supported the Women's Emancipation Bill and would have preferred it to the Sex Disqualification Bill. The London Society for Women's Service sent a letter of thanks to the MPs who had voted for the Women's Emancipation Bill.¹⁶³ NUSEC were vigorous in their promotion of the Women's Emancipation Bill, organising deputations, processions and public meetings, and regarded the Sex Disqualification Act in comparison as 'not nearly as wide in its scope.'¹⁶⁴ The National Council of Women passed a resolution of support for the Women's Emancipation Bill in May 1919, and refused to 'approve in the main' the Sex Disqualification bill.¹⁶⁵ Ray Strachey waxes lyrical about the Women's Emancipation Bill in *The Cause*: 'This Bill was intended to remove at one sweep all the remaining disabilities of women...'¹⁶⁶ However, in her enthusiasm she claims a little too much for it, saying it would have made women liable for jury service and eligible to become members of all societies and corporations controlled by Charter. As this research has shown, these clauses were not part of the Women's Emancipation Bill but added to the Sex Disqualification Bill during its journey through Parliament.

Nevertheless it is misleading to argue that the Sex Disqualification Bill was 'opposed' by feminist groups. However disappointing it was to lose the Women's Emancipation Bill, they were pragmatic about working with the Sex Disqualification Bill subsequently. As shown by the delegation of women, they lobbied vigorously for amendments; this was not a negative action but positive constructive work. The NUSEC Annual Report for 1919 cited by Smith actually

¹⁶¹ PA, LG/G/119.

¹⁶² Smith, 'British Feminism', p52.

¹⁶³ WL, 2LSW/A/4/1/3/2, minutes 9 Jul 1919.

¹⁶⁴ WL, 2NSE/C/02. NUSEC Annual Report 1919, p31.

¹⁶⁵ London Metropolitan Archives [thereafter LMA], ACC 3613/1/4. Executive Committee minutes, Jan, May, Jul 1919.

¹⁶⁶ Strachey, *The Cause*, p375.

stated; 'Seeing however that half a loaf was better than no bread, it proceeded in co-operation with the London Society for Women's Service and other Societies, by means of deputations and in other ways to try and improve the Bill as it stood.' Likewise, the National Council of Women had been urging the government to make good on its manifesto commitment to remove inequalities from early 1919. Once the Sex Disqualification Bill was on the agenda, they started to try to amend that. In September 1919 letters were going out to branches asking for support for amendments to the Sex Disqualification Bill, including the addition of 'and marriage' and having regulations laid in draft; and in November 1919 it was reported that efforts had been made in vain to persuade a peer to move an amendment about not excluding women from jury service.¹⁶⁷ All these actions show realistic work towards achievable goals. Ray Strachey herself was at the time realistic as to what they might expect, as can be seen by her statement to Bonar Law and the Lord Chancellor in the delegation, which, while arguing for equality, acknowledged the force of the government argument about women in the foreign service.¹⁶⁸ And, before the delegation, Pippa Strachey wrote that raising the matter of employment of married women was questionable as 'it is feared this may lead to representatives of the Government riding off on this question and diverting attention from the main point.'¹⁶⁹ This shows not only awareness of the marriage bar issue but acknowledgement of the scale of the task before them and the importance of having realistic goals.

Of course it was extremely disappointing to women's groups that the Sex Disqualification bill omitted the equal franchise clause. However Ray Strachey admits that women 'did not seriously expect the extension of the vote on equal terms so soon.'¹⁷⁰ Millicent Fawcett writes that 1919 was 'not a bad harvest for one session when we remember the 12 years' work necessary to get the Midwives Bill 1902, or the 32 years of hard labour before the Nurses Registration bill.' She was positive regarding women on juries, as magistrates, in universities and the legal profession, although the civil service situation was 'disappointing'.¹⁷¹ The NUSEC conclusion was 'the doors of the Civil Service have been considerably widened... The Act may

¹⁶⁷ LMA, ACC 3613/1/4. Executive Committee minutes, July, Sep, Nov 1919.

¹⁶⁸ PA, BL/98/1/9.

¹⁶⁹ WL, 6NCS/2/A/11 National Society of Women Civil Servants. Letter dated 8 Aug 1919.

¹⁷⁰ Strachey, *The Cause*, p376.

¹⁷¹ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The women's victory -- and after: personal reminiscences, 1911-1918* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1920), pp163-164.

be said to lay a useful foundation for future building.¹⁷² Strachey overall was positive that the victories won by the Sex Disqualification Act were worthwhile, citing women's subsequent entry to the legal profession ('one of the objects of the feminist societies for many years'), jury service ('a privilege... recognised to be very important'), the immediate appointment of women magistrates and the opening to women of professional bodies. She describes the Sex Disqualification Act as one of a number of achievements during 1919, together with the election of Nancy Astor and the equal treatment of women in the new League of Nations. She adds 'the following year, 1920, was less prosperous.'¹⁷³

The Sacred Year

The idea of 1919 marking a turning point because of the Sex Disqualification Act can be found in perhaps an unlikely place: Virginia Woolf in her essay 'Three Guineas', refers to it repeatedly. 'Three Guineas', published in 1938, is an essay outlining how to prevent war by giving a guinea to three organisations, one of which helps women find employment in the professions (the National Society for Women's Service). The relevance of this to the Sex Disqualification Act is obvious. What is remarkable is that Woolf regards the Act as a real turning point. She refers to 'Marriage, the one great profession open to our class from the dawn of time to the year 1919.'¹⁷⁴ She does not even stop to explain what 1919 meant initially, apparently assuming that her audience would know. Later she does explain; when discussing the right to earn one's living she says, 'That, Sir, was the right conferred on us less than 20 years ago by an Act which unbarred the professions. The door of the private house was thrown open'. She returns to the date again and again, using it as a talisman: 'the sacred year 1919.' Woolf did not see the Act as the solution to everything. 'It is true that for the last 20 years we have been admitted to the civil service and to the Bar but our position there is still very precarious and our authority of the slightest.' Indeed, the whole point of the need to donate a guinea is that professional women cannot afford to dress well or eat properly, as they are not achieving the high positions of men. She also refers to areas still closed to women, including the Army, the Navy, the London Stock Exchange, the Church and the diplomatic service. And

¹⁷² WL, 2NSE/C/02. NUSEC Annual Report 1919, p31.

¹⁷³ Strachey, *The Cause*, p379.

¹⁷⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A room of one's own; Three guineas* (London, Penguin, 1993), p120.

she refers to the marriage bar: "'Miss' transmits sex... the swish of petticoats, the savour of scent...' which is disagreeable in Whitehall. And as for 'Mrs', 'Whitehall excludes it entirely'.¹⁷⁵

Yet this does not detract from the significance of 1919. Women (and Woolf is concerned here with middle class women, the 'daughters of educated men') now had the right to earn a living.¹⁷⁶ She paints a picture of the educated man's daughter trapped in the private house, with no options until 1919. There is a real echo here of Captain Loseby MP in Parliament, citing the example of his six 'shabby genteel' sisters who had the options only of being governesses, nurses, or schoolmistresses, as 'all other avenues were closed'. Loseby explained that there is not a great demand for the daughter of the shabby genteel; 'Hers is a drab life. She possibly becomes drab in herself, and, therefore the marriage market so far as she is concerned, is closed to her.'¹⁷⁷ Of course Woolf was an atypical woman in many ways. She was writing literature, not history, and the repeated use of '1919' is a device she used to increase historical authority, to make a political point. Indeed it can be argued that the inadequacies of the Act serve to demonstrate that Woolf was merely structuring a literary argument.¹⁷⁸ Yet it can also be argued that her feminist ideas were rooted at the intellectual centre of the suffrage movement.¹⁷⁹ It is clear that she empathised with the class of 'shabby genteel' women and she saw the Act as significant for them. She was knowledgeable about the Act; possibly this knowledge stemmed from the fact that her half-sister Stella was married to Major Hills. Woolf did not see the Act as a 'broken reed' but symbolising a 'sacred year': a ground-breaking event which saved a certain class of women from having a choice between marriage or nothing.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p130, p141, pp126-7, p172. Woolf's list of closed areas proved to be a selection of the most stubborn. Women's branches were merged into the regular Army, Navy and Air Force between 1992-1994. The Stock Exchange was opened to women in 1973, and Clara Furst became its first woman Chief Executive in 2001. As previously referred to in this chapter, the diplomatic service was opened in 1946 and women priests could be ordained after 1992.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p226.

¹⁷⁷ HC Deb 4 Apr 1919 vol 114 c1605, Loseby.

¹⁷⁸ Mary M Childers, 'Virginia Woolf on the outside looking down: reflections on the class of women', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38(1), 1992, pp5-6.

¹⁷⁹ Sowon S Park, 'Suffrage and Virginia Woolf: "the mass behind the single voice"', pp119-134 in *Review of English Studies* 56(223), 2005. Park argues that although Woolf resisted a certain kind of feminism (as exemplified by the militant WSPU's jingoistic, aristocratic model), her feminist views were informed by suffrage politics and deserve to be considered alongside that of Ray Strachey and Eleanor Rathbone.

'We shall not carry the citadel at the first assault': Conclusion

The Sex Disqualification Bill was a government replacement for a more radical private members' bill. It was a compromise and regarded as one, by contemporaries and historians. The two really radical clauses on equal franchise and woman peers were lost.

The Sex Disqualification Act has been consistently cited by historians as evidence for a wider historical judgement that feminist achievements in the inter-war period were insignificant: 'By the end of the 1920s the feminist movement resembled an exhausted volcano';¹⁸⁰ that the reforms which were achieved were 'guided by non-feminist forces' and channelled women into maintaining their more traditional place in society.¹⁸¹ Even historians more sympathetic to the success of women's organisations in this period portrayed the Act as of little practical use because of unsuccessful attempts to use it to remove the marriage bar, enable women peers and so on. Cheryl Law argues that the government manipulated the women's organisations, bartering the franchise for a handful of less threatening reforms.¹⁸²

However, this negative verdict obscures the positive spirit in the Commons in which the Women's Emancipation Bill was passed. It overlooks the genuine achievements of the Act, and assumes standards that fail to take into account the situation in 1919. As Brian Harrison has said, the achievements of feminists in the inter-war period 'took place within a most unfavourable political, international, intellectual and economic climate; it must not be judged by some abstract standard, but in relation to the difficulties faced.'¹⁸³ The Sex Disqualification Act was passed shortly after the end of the Great War, with the peace settlement ongoing, trouble in Ireland, returning soldiers - the government had many other priorities and it is remarkable that such a bill was able to progress at all. It was only a year after women were given the limited franchise, only a few years since suffragettes had been barracking Parliament; it was only now that women in Parliament were potential voters and MPs, rather than trouble-makers capable of violence; Millicent Fawcett observes that the same year saw the quiet removal of the heavy grille on the House of Commons ladies' gallery, and the opening

¹⁸⁰ Smith, 'Sex versus Class'.

¹⁸¹ Smith, 'British Feminism'.

¹⁸² Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and power: the women's movement, 1918-1928* (London: I B Tauris, 1997), pp186-188.

¹⁸³ Brian Harrison, *Prudent revolutionaries: portraits of British feminists between the wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p323.

to women of the strangers' gallery.¹⁸⁴ The latter was debated in the House of Commons directly after it agreed to allow women MPs in October 1918, after little debate and no division, following a resolution in the House of Lords to admit ladies to the strangers' gallery there.¹⁸⁵

And although the government and the civil service certainly limited the extent of the reform, Parliament did not. Careful consideration of the debates show real attempts by both peers and MPs firstly to try and pass the Women's Emancipation Bill and then to make the Sex Disqualification Bill work. The support from so many different types of men is surprising and interesting. From William Adamson with his 27 years as a miner, to the high-born Lord Robert Cecil, MPs from all parties united to ensure women's entry to the professions. One of the most prominent MPs working to make positive amendments was Major Hills, Conservative, Eton and Oxford. He showed admirable realism, as he wrote afterwards about his battle to get rid of proviso (a), 'I am disappointed, but not greatly surprised, at our civil service failure. I am doing what I can, and we shall make a big attack on the Orders in Council when they appear, but we shall not carry the citadel at the first assault, I fear.'¹⁸⁶ Hills showed great dedication to the women's cause even before the Women's Emancipation Bill was introduced,¹⁸⁷ and continued fighting on behalf of women in the civil service through the interwar period.¹⁸⁸

Finally, even in its revised form, the Sex Disqualification Act really was a significant advance on the previous situation. As F A R Bennion remarks, the scope was 'splendidly general' and 'all-embracing'.¹⁸⁹ The immediate effect was that women were allowed into the professions and professional bodies. The 1911 census shows that before 1919 the only profession to have any significant number of women was medicine; there were just 7 women architects, 11 accountants, 12 dentists, and no lawyers, engineers or surveyors. 'Now work which allowed

¹⁸⁴ Fawcett, *The Women's Victory*, p166. The Ladies' Gallery had a metal grille covering its windows, which suffragettes from the WFL famously chained themselves to in 1908, removed in 1917 (not 1918 as Fawcett says). Women were permitted to sit alongside men in the Strangers' Gallery from 1918. The Ladies' Gallery continued in existence until the House of Commons chamber was destroyed by bombing in 1943 (see chapter 6).

¹⁸⁵ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c862.

¹⁸⁶ WL, 6APC/2/06. Hills to Miss Caldcleugh, 10 Nov 1919.

¹⁸⁷ HC Deb 4 Nov 1918 vol 110 c1871.

¹⁸⁸ Glew, 'Women's Employment in the General Post Office'.

¹⁸⁹ Bennion, 'The sex disqualification (removal) act'.

women to support themselves in some dignity was at least available.¹⁹⁰ Ivy Williams was the first woman to be called to the Bar in 1922.¹⁹¹ Helena Normanton was the first woman law student within a matter of hours of the passage of the Act in 1919, duly becoming the first woman barrister to practice in 1922, the same year in which Carrie Morrison became the first woman solicitor.¹⁹² Aleen Cust, the first woman veterinary surgeon, was finally allowed to join the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons twenty-two years after completing her training.¹⁹³ The legal battle of Georgina Frost to hold the office of clerk of the petty sessions was ended.¹⁹⁴ Female firsts such as these received a great deal of coverage in the popular press.¹⁹⁵ By opening up the professions, the eligibility of women for specialist work was accepted from the start in new areas such as broadcasting.¹⁹⁶ Women were allowed to sit on juries, which the Women's Emancipation Bill would not have legalised. In 1928 a woman served as 'foreman' of a jury at the Central Criminal Court, in possibly the first such occasion.¹⁹⁷ Thanks to the Act, Vera Brittain and her fellow Oxford students were able to take their degrees. Although the marriage bar issue was not resolved, the words 'by reason of sex or marriage' were incorporated into law, and the intention of those who introduced this had been that the bar should go. The MPs also did as much as they could to mitigate the effect of regulations by Orders in Council. Even the Lord Chancellor, who gave the impression throughout the passage

¹⁹⁰ Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and women's employment in nineteenth century Britain* (London, Routledge, 1999), pp219-221.

¹⁹¹ Hazel Fox, 'Williams, Ivy (1877–1966)', *ODNB*.

¹⁹² In an echo of Woolf's 'sacred year', the Association of Women Solicitors originally called itself the '1919 Club'. <<http://www.awsmanchester.org.uk/History-of-AWS.aspx>> Accessed 19 Mar 2012. Even today its Chairwoman wears a ceremonial medal commemorating '1919'.

¹⁹³ Sherwin A Hall, 'Cust, Aleen Isabel (1868–1937)', *ODNB*.

¹⁹⁴ Frost took over the post from her father when he retired in 1915, having assisted him for six years, but found she could not legally be appointed to it. The case reached the House of Lords in 1920, by which time it had been rendered moot by the Sex Disqualification (Removal Act), and Frost was duly appointed. Ronan Keane, 'Frost, Georgina (1879–1939)', *ODNB*.

¹⁹⁵ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, modernity and the popular press in inter-war Britain* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004), p50.

¹⁹⁶ The BBC was established in 1922. As a new industry, it could create employment practices from scratch, and it a culture of opportunity and a climate of equality for at least some women. Catherine Murphy, "'On an equal footing with men?" Women and work at the BBC, 1923-1939', (Goldsmiths College, University of London, PhD, 2011).

¹⁹⁷ *The Times*, 13 Sep 1928, in TNA, HO 45/13321.

of the bill that the whole issue was most distasteful to him, nevertheless observed that, 'the current and development of events have plainly so proceeded to produce, whether we wish it or whether we do not wish it, a complete revolution in the position of women'.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ HL Deb 22 July 1919 vol 35 c897, Lord Chancellor.

Chapter Three

Equality in law? The passage of the Equal Guardianship Act 1925

The Guardianship of Infants Act was passed on 31 July 1925 and enshrined into law the principle of equal guardianship for mothers and fathers. This intention was made clear in the preamble:

Whereas Parliament by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, and various other enactments, has sought to establish equality in law between the sexes, and it is expedient that this principle should obtain with respect to the guardianship of infants and the rights and responsibilities conferred thereby....¹

One MP remarked, 'so far as I know, this is the first time there have been included in a Bill the words which appear in the preamble of this Bill, namely "equality in law between the sexes."' ²

The law previously, based on the Guardianship of Infants Act 1886, was that parental authority of a legitimate child was vested in the father. Such authority, even if largely unrealised by many, was of significant symbolic importance,³ and could be of real significance on the break-up of a marriage. By contrast, the 1925 Act set out that the welfare of an infant would be the paramount consideration of any court, which 'shall not take into consideration whether... the claim of the father... in respect of custody, upbringing, administration or application is superior to that of the mother, or the claim of the mother is superior to that of the father.' The mother had an equal right to apply to court as the father over any matter, and if a court granted custody to the mother it could also order the father to pay maintenance to the mother. The Act also dealt with other matters relating to guardianship including the power to appoint guardians, enforcement of orders for payment of money, and consents required to marriage of infants.

The Act is often referred to in passing by historians, but rarely in detail. Cheryl Law gives early failures of guardianship bills as an example of Parliament 'wrecking' the efforts of women's

¹ *Guardianship of Infants Act 1925*, ch.45.

² HC Deb 17 Jul 1925 vol 186 c1767, John Rhys Davies (Labour).

³ S M Cretney, *Family law in the twentieth century: a history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p566 and p575.

organisations, in one paragraph. The eventual passage of the Act is referred to as proof of NUSEC's tenacity.⁴ Tim Fisher considers the passage of the bills in detail, but in the context of an examination of working-class fatherhood, rather than Parliament, politics or women's campaigning.⁵ Laura King refers to the significance of the Act as part of a broader study of fatherhood and masculinity, but does not cover its passage in detail.⁶ Stephen Cretney analyses the significance of the Act but as a tiny part of a comprehensive analysis of a century-long history of family law.⁷

Yet by the time this Act passed in 1925 it had a five year history of previous legislative attempts by private members' bills behind it. Melinda Haunton has considered the significance of these repeated attempts, but only insofar as this affected Conservative party policy.⁸ The unsuccessful bills are also of interest for various reasons to do with Parliament and its procedures: firstly as a case of pressure being put on government by successive private members' bills; secondly as an example of Parliament using a joint select committee to gather evidence, ascertain facts and take the matter forward; and thirdly as a case of differences between the Commons and Lords. More generally, it is also interesting to ascertain the role played by pressure groups and how effective women could be in successfully exerting influence over legislation after they got the vote, particularly Eva Hubback for NUSEC.

Overall progress

Session	Bill	Parliamentary progress
1920	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HC Bill 119. Presented by Colonel Greig	2nd reading passed in Commons

⁴ Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and power: the women's movement, 1918-1928* (London: I B Tauris, 1997), p162.

⁵ Timothy James Fisher, 'Fatherhood and the Experience of Working-Class Fathers in Britain, 1900-1939', (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, PhD, 2004), chapter 2. Thanks to Daniel J R Grey for this reference.

⁶ Laura Catherine King, 'Fatherhood and masculinity in Britain, c. 1918-1960', University of Sheffield, PhD thesis (2011), pp171-174.

⁷ Cretney, *Family law*.

⁸ Melinda Alison Haunton, 'Conservatism and society: aspects of government policy 1924-1929', Royal Holloway, University of London, PhD thesis (2002), pp81-82, 85. Haunton considers the Equal Guardianship Act as part of a small group along with the Summary Jurisdiction (Separation & Maintenance) Act 1925, Legitimacy Act 1926, Adoption Act 1926, and Age of Marriage Act 1929. However the analysis of all five Acts comprises only half of one chapter.

	(Liberal).	
1921	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HC Bill 5. Presented by Colonel Greig.	2nd reading passed in Commons
1922	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HL Bill 8. Introduced by Lord Askwith.	Passed 2nd reading 1 Mar 1922. At committee stage on 25 May 1922, referred to Joint Committee under Earl Wemyss (Conservative).
	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HC Bill 16. Presented by Lieutenant Commander Sir Harry Chilcott (Conservative).	At request of the Lords, bill referred to Joint Committee at 2nd reading on 26 May 1922. Parliament dissolved before committee reported.
1923	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HL Bill 22. Introduced by Lord Askwith.	Passed 2nd reading and referred to joint committee under Earl Wemyss. Parliament dissolved before it reported, but proceedings, draft report and Minutes of Evidence printed.
1924	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HC Bill 25. Presented by Mrs Wintringham (Liberal).	Passed 2nd reading in Commons, 4 April. Wintringham then came into discussions with the government, leading to a new bill introduced in the Lords.
	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HL Bill 102. Government bill, introduced by the Lord Chancellor.	Passed 2nd reading on 3 June, and committee stage in House of Lords. Parliament dissolved in October when Labour government fell.
1925	Guardianship of Infants Bill, HC Bill 57.	Passed and became Act.

Table 3.1 Equal Guardianship bills 1920-1925**Accepting the principle: 1920-1922**

Equal guardianship had long been an issue for women's organisations, and during the long campaign for the vote it was cited as one of the many inequalities that women could change if they had the vote.⁹ Various feminist organisations worked towards equal guardianship; it was one of the original six points of the Six Point Group.¹⁰ However, the role of NUSEC was most

⁹ The suffrage notebook of Mary Mills records an occasion in 1883 when the guardianship of children was discussed in Parliament. "The ladies in the gallery were indignant at the whole tone and manner of the debate and felt that nothing had ever so conclusively proved to them the absolute need existing for the direct representation of women in Parliament as the foolish utterances of so many men". WL, 3/MMI.

¹⁰ The six points were 1) satisfactory legislation on child assault; 2) satisfactory legislation for the widowed mother; 3) satisfactory legislation for the unmarried mother and her child; 4) equal rights of

important in getting equal guardianship onto the political agenda. As soon as partial franchise had been achieved in 1918, equal guardianship was part of NUSEC's programme of priority legislation. It was not seen in isolation, but connected with other legislative priorities including widows pensions.¹¹ As early as 1919 a conference was held aimed at sympathetic MPs,¹² and they persuaded a Conservative MP, Frederick Macquisten, to ballot for an Equal Guardianship bill, although he was not successful.¹³ The first bill in 1920 was drafted and introduced by Colonel Greig for NUSEC.¹⁴ It was supported by MPs from various parties¹⁵ and simply provided for the mother to be 'joint guardian with the father, and have equal authority, rights and responsibility.' The Home Office thought the bill 'makes violent alterations' in the existing law of guardianship.¹⁶ It obtained a second reading, but made no further Parliamentary progress.¹⁷

NUSEC worked hard to keep the issue on the public and political radar. A conference was aimed at other women's organisations on 18 March 1921;¹⁸ gaining support from other

guardianship for married parents; 5) equal pay for teachers and 6) equal opportunities for men and women in the civil service. Dale Spender, ed, *Time and tide wait for no man* (London: Pandora Press, 1984), p175. These later evolved into six general points of equality for women: political, occupational, moral, social, economic and legal.

¹¹ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/1 – NUSEC Widow's Pension & Equal Guardianship Special Committee. The first minutes in the file just cover equal guardianship and date from 9 Sept 1919 but refer to a previous meeting. By the time of the next meeting on 12 Nov 1919 equal guardianship was linked with widow's pensions.

¹² WL, 2/NSE/A/5/1 and 2/NSE/A/5/2.

¹³ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/1, minutes 9 Sep 1919.

¹⁴ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/1, minutes, 1920. Colonel James William Greig was a Liberal MP and barrister. Although he lost his seat in Parliament in 1922 he continued to assist NUSEC with equal guardianship.

¹⁵ Supported by Nancy Astor, Major Hills, Sir James Agg-Gardner and Sir Martin Conway, (all Conservative) Mr James Brown (Labour), Dr John Murray (Liberal), and Captain Loseby (National Democratic). Long-standing MP Agg-Gardner, first elected in 1874, had been an early supporter of women's suffrage.

¹⁶ TNA, LCO 2/757. Harris to Claud Schuster, 29 May 1920.

¹⁷ *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol 175, p295. NUSEC minutes record that amendments to the bill were being considered by Greig and Hubback, with a view to their being moved when the Bill came before Standing Committee D, but this was not likely for some time. WL, 2/NSE/A/5/1, minutes 10 Nov 1920.

¹⁸ WL, 3/AMS/B/14/5.

organisations was important.¹⁹ By 1921 equal guardianship and widows' pensions were being considered together with other inequalities in law, by a Status of Wives and Mothers sub-committee.²⁰ The 1921 bill, presented and supported by the same MPs as in 1920, was expanded to include 'powers to enforce orders regarding the custody of, right of access to, maintenance, and education of infants,' with a long new section on the powers of a court to deduct maintenance from wages. This made it immediately controversial. The Home Office and Lord Chancellor's Office were keen to resist,²¹ although not all the opinions they commissioned were against it. The Official Solicitor at Royal Courts of Justice was in favour of some parts and wrote, 'I am convinced that many cases of real hardship will be avoided if the law is altered as suggested.'²² The 1921 bill passed both second reading and committee stage in the House of Commons, showing that the principle of equal guardianship was largely accepted by MPs.

It was argued from the start that equal guardianship was merely enacting a broader general principle of equality: Colonel Greig stated, 'This claim is but a phase of the application of the principle of equal citizenship of women before the law,' citing the 1918 Coalition government manifesto commitment to remove all existing inequalities of law,²³ arguing that guardianship was one of the most important examples of this.²⁴ As Nancy Astor put it, 'Take the case of a woman who is unfortunately married to a rotter... When she comes to die she realises that she has to leave a large family under the guardianship of a man who has proved a bad father and a bad husband. This bill stops that.'²⁵

¹⁹ After the 1921 Conference the Association of Moral & Social Hygiene wrote to the Home Secretary Edward Shortt on 16 April 1921 on the importance of equal guardianship. WL, 3/AMS/B/14/5.

²⁰ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2 – Status of Wives and Mothers sub-committee. Later this became the Married Women's Drafting Committee, then the Married Women's Parliamentary Bills Committee. WL, 2/NSE/A/5/3 & 4.

²¹ The Home Office thought it 'hardly less objectionable' than the 1920 bill. TNA, HO 45/11566.

²² TNA, LCO 2/757. L R Bradshaw, Official Solicitor at Royal Courts of Justice, to Lord Chancellor, 11 Jul 1921.

²³ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1395-6, Greig.

²⁴ *Proceedings of the Joint Committee on the Guardianship of Infants Bill [H.L.], Minutes of Evidence and Appendix*. HL 95 & HL 163, 1924, V, p.460. [Hereafter *Proceedings*.]

²⁵ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1403, Astor.

There was not a huge amount of resistance to equal guardianship in the Commons; a male MP said it was, 'Not a sex question, and above all, it is not a party question.'²⁶ Astor remarked, 'I think the House is unanimous, apart from a few glaring and notorious exceptions.' The glaring and notorious exceptions made arguments that equal guardianship was to be avoided as it would damage family life. 'The poor child would be the shuttlecock of its father's and mother's idiosyncrasies.' Proof of the success of NUSEC's lobbying came when some MPs claimed to feel persecuted by the size of their postbags, complaining of, 'These women's societies, who persecute us with the women's point of view in regard to almost everything.' One MP protested that 'They seek interviews with me upon questions which I blush to discuss with them very much, on account of my entirely modest nature.... people... whom I regard as suffragettes out of a job.'²⁷

Delegation to Joint Committees, 1922-23

The 1921 bill was stalled at report stage by opponents (including the notorious Frederick Banbury)²⁸ and then ran out of time as the government refused to prioritise it, despite a series of questions by supporters including Astor.²⁹ NUSEC decided to maintain pressure in the next Parliamentary session, including a deputation of important women's organisations to Coalition Party whips.³⁰ There was sufficient pressure that bills were introduced in 1922 both in the House of Commons by the Conservative Harry Chilcott³¹ and in the House of Lords by Lord

²⁶ HC Deb 4 Apr 1924 vol 171 c2678, Sir Philip Richardson.

²⁷ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1402, Astor; c1407, Major Sir Bertram Falle; c.1410. John Gordon Jameson (Conservative); c1411, Jameson.

²⁸ HC Deb 29 June 1921 vol 143 c2295; 19 July 1921 vol 144 c2160. The NUSEC minutes record 'Unfortunately Sir Frederick Banbury had put down some wrecking amendments.' WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2.

²⁹ HC Deb 27 Jul 1921 vol 145 c463; 20 Oct 1921 vol 147 c231.

³⁰ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2. Minutes 27 Oct [1921].

³¹ Supported by Nancy Astor, Sir James Agg-Gardner, Captain Edward Bagley, Sir Martin Conway, Sir Robert Newman (all Conservative), James Brown (Labour), Colonel Greig, Dr Murray, Mrs Wintringham (Liberal), and Captain Loseby.

Askwith.³² The Lords gave it a second reading; Viscount Haldane stated that equal guardianship 'only brings up the law to the general level at which it ought to be.' The government was sympathetic but again refused to commit time, instead agreeing to appoint a committee to consider it.³³

It is clear that pressure from women's organisations made the government consider the issue. At the Home Affairs Committee meeting on 23 Feb 1922 the Solicitor General said, 'as women voters were exercising great pressure in the matter it should be read a second time and referred to a Select Committee.'³⁴ Claud Schuster, permanent secretary in the Lord Chancellor's Office, wrote that the Home Affairs Committee, 'took the view that it was very undesirable to annoy the women who are the main backers of the Bill and some members of the Cabinet were probably vaguely in favour of the Bill... It is desirable to postpone for as long as possible the appearance of opposition to the Bill.'³⁵ Indeed, the government began negotiations with the promoters of the bill with a view to reaching some agreement.³⁶ The Attorney-General approached NUSEC to ask how much of the bill it would be prepared to drop, suggesting they kept only equal custody, which NUSEC rejected.³⁷ The government then decided to appoint a Joint Select Committee,³⁸ and the Commons bill was referred to this committee without debate.³⁹ Following a conference, NUSEC reluctantly accepted the joint

³² Lord Askwith was raised to the peerage in 1919 for his achievements as an industrial arbitrator. He was supportive of women's education and his wife also worked for various women's committees during and after the First World War. Rodney Lowe, 'Askwith, George Ranken, Baron Askwith (1861–1942)', *ODNB*.

³³ HL Deb 1 Mar 1922 vol 49 c255, Viscount Haldane; c254, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Health (Earl of Onslow). HC Deb 29 Mar 1922 vol 152 c1370, Shortt.

³⁴ TNA, LCO 2/757. HAC 105 Minute 3.

³⁵ Ibid. Claud Schuster to the Lord Chancellor, 1 Mar 1922. Sir Claud Schuster (1869-1956) was 'a powerful figure in Whitehall and a superbly competent administrator,' Cretney, *Family law*, p805. There is more on Schuster later in this chapter.

³⁶ TNA, LCO 2/757. HAC 111 Minute 4, 9 May 1922.

³⁷ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2. Minutes, 27 Apr 1922.

³⁸ HL Deb 25 Mar 1922 vol 49 c770.

³⁹ HC Deb 26 May 1922 vol 154 c1608.

committee as the only possible way forward,⁴⁰ and Eva Hubback, Parliamentary Secretary of NUSEC, put forward names of members of both Houses for consideration as members of the committee.⁴¹

Hubback and Chrystal Macmillan⁴² gave evidence to the Joint Committee and reported, 'The committee appeared to be in favour of the principle of equal guardianship but did not see how it could be worked out in practice.'⁴³ But the work of this Joint Committee was halted by the dissolution of Parliament in 1922. The first two women MPs, Nancy Astor and Mrs Wintringham, played a crucial role in having it reappointed after the general election. The Prime Minister, Bonar Law, said on 12 December 1922 that no useful purpose would be served by reappointing; Astor and Wintringham promptly wrote to disagree on 20 December and asked him to reconsider.⁴⁴ The evidence taken in 1922⁴⁵ was used in re-drafting the bill in 1923,⁴⁶ and the Joint Select Committee was reconvened in 1923 with an identical membership from the Lords,⁴⁷ the Commons members changing because of the intervening election.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ The weighty government and civil service attendees at the conference included the Home Secretary (Edward Shortt, Liberal), Minister of Health (Sir Alfred Mond, Liberal), Attorney-General (Ernest Pollock, Conservative), Solicitor-General (Leslie Scott, Conservative), T W H Inskip (Conservative) and Claud Schuster. The promoters of the bill present were Lord Askwith, NUSEC President Eleanor Rathbone, NUSEC officer Elizabeth Macadam, Chrystal Macmillan, Eva Hubback, and MPs Colonel Greig and Lieutenant-Commander Chilcott. WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2. Minutes 25 May 1922.

⁴¹ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2. Minutes, 22 June [1922].

⁴² The feminist Chrystal Macmillan trained as a lawyer following the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act and passed the Bar in early 1924. Sybil Oldfield, 'Macmillan, (Jessie) Chrystal (1872–1937)', *ODNB*.

⁴³ WL, 2/NSE/A/5/2. Minutes, 27 June [1922].

⁴⁴ TNA, HO 45/11566. Letter dated 20 Dec 1922.

⁴⁵ The work of the 1922 Committee was not printed, although uncorrected proofs of evidence taken on 19 and 20 Jul 1922 and some memoranda can be found in TNA, MH 53/53.

⁴⁶ HL Deb 26 Mar 1923 vol 53 c631, Lord Askwith.

⁴⁷ Lords committee members in both 1922 and 1923 were the Earl of Wemyss (chair), Duke of Northumberland (Conservative), Earl of Onslow (Conservative), Lord MacDonnell (Conservative), Lord Terrington (husband of Liberal MP Lady Terrington) and Lord Askwith.

⁴⁸ The Commons committee members in 1922 were the Registrar-General, John Cairns (Lab), Chilcott, Robert Newman and Augustine Hailwood (all Conservative), Greig and Mrs Wintringham (both Liberal). After the committee was reconvened in 1923 the members were initially Cairns, Geoffrey Ellis (Conservative) (Cairns and Ellis did not make it to a single meeting), Gerald Hurst (Conservative), Robert

The government did hesitate before going down this route again. Neither Bridgeman, the Home Secretary, nor Cave, the Lord Chancellor, wanted to pass an equal guardianship bill. Bridgeman wrote, 'I think there is no very great demand for the measure - and that it is extraordinarily difficult to frame one which would be workable,' and Cave opined, 'I think that the best course is for the government to abstain from giving any encouragement whatsoever.'⁴⁹ Nevertheless they agreed that a committee was necessary, and, again, pressure from backbench MPs and the desire to forestall a private member's bill was cited as the reason. Bridgeman wrote, 'If we do not set up a Select Committee, probably some Private Member's Bill will get a second reading on a Friday afternoon and we shall then be faced with the difficult task of trying to amend it.'⁵⁰ The government were careful not to say they supported the bill; this was unsurprising, as Bridgeman's opinion was that, 'If the bill is to be killed, I think it will be much easier to kill it after the Select Committee has reported.'⁵¹

Joint Committee evidence: the case for equal guardianship

The Joint Committee took evidence from twenty-two witnesses.⁵² They included representatives from government departments, lawyers and experts from other countries. Much of the evidence concerned the technicalities of how equal guardianship might work, especially details of drafting the bill. There was clause-by-clause analysis and changes made by Leslie Burgin, bill promoter and draftsman.⁵³ Witnesses, including Eva Hubback for NUSEC, were allowed to take it clause-by-clause and argue their position.

Chancellor Nesbitt (Conservative), Robert Richardson (Labour) and Mrs Wintringham. Robert Murray (Labour) was added at an early stage, before any evidence was taken. Ellis was subsequently replaced by Mrs Philipson (Conservative).

⁴⁹ TNA, LCO 2/757. Bridgeman to Cave (handwritten addition at end), 15 Jan 1923. Cave to Bridgeman, 22 Jan 1923.

⁵⁰ Ibid, Bridgeman to Cave, 15 Jan 1923.

⁵¹ Ibid, Bridgeman to Cave, 30 Jan 1923.

⁵² *Proceedings*, pp.293-522.

⁵³ Edward Leslie Burgin was a lawyer, later elected to Parliament as a Liberal in 1929, and a National Liberal from 1931.

NUSEC were keen to emphasise injustices to mothers under the existing law.⁵⁴ The fact that 'the mother of a lawful child is in rather a worse position than the mother of an illegitimate child,'⁵⁵ who had full rights, was stressed. Mrs V M Crawford⁵⁶ from the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society spoke of how 'The rights which are denied to the deserted wife or to the widow or wife, are of course enjoyed in full by the unmarried mother... it makes them more determined not to get married if they have the chance.'⁵⁷ Eleanor Rathbone was at pains to give evidence from her experience as a social worker and magistrate on the suffering of children where 'neglect is pushed very far indeed, just short of extreme cruelty.' It was also important for the status of women; 'Public opinion encourages the woman to think she is immensely important as a wife and mother, but her status in the eyes of the law is really the status of a serf.'⁵⁸

Examples of suffering were given by Mrs E D Hood from her experience as a magistrate,⁵⁹ heart-breaking cases where husbands used children as a weapon against the mothers. Hood explained, 'we cannot give them a separation order unless they leave their husbands... an utter impossibility in the case of working class people.'⁶⁰ One woman married to a 'rotter' gave evidence on her own position. Mrs Orton worked as a secretary and lived with her husband, but without access to her children: he sent them to a boarding school without her knowledge, and took them away with him during the holidays without telling her where. She did not think she could obtain access via a court as she was not separated. The committee suggested she

⁵⁴ *Proceedings*, p521.

⁵⁵ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1394, Greig.

⁵⁶ Virginia Mary Crawford (1862-1948) was best known in her youth as a party in the Dilke divorce case of 1886, but by this period had built up a reputation for her social work. Robin M Gard, 'Crawford, Virginia Mary (1862-1948)', *ODNB*.

⁵⁷ *Proceedings*, pp353-354.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p336.

⁵⁹ Women magistrates were enabled by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, see chapter 2. *Proceedings*, p364.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p363. Hood spoke on behalf of the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Standing Joint Committee of Women's Industrial Organisations.

take fresh legal advice.⁶¹ Hubback thought it was 'highly probable she could not have got custody because there was nothing against the husband.'⁶²

NUSEC had worked hard to obtain support from a wide variety of other women's organisations for this bill. Greig had listed twenty-one of them in 1921,⁶³ when Nancy Astor was able to say proudly that 'no Bill that has been introduced since November 1918 has caused more interest among women than this equal guardianship bill.'⁶⁴ Support more than doubled over the next two years. The Appendix to the Committee proceedings in 1923 lists 49 organisations supporting the 1923 bill.⁶⁵ This included national bodies promoting equality generally, trade unions, family orientated groups, political groups, religious groups⁶⁶ and others. Hubback chose to stress the support of 'very large organisations... the Salvation Army... the Mothers Union... the Women's Co-operative Guild.'⁶⁷ Despite this, it was hotly debated how much the average woman knew about equal guardianship and whether there was much demand for a bill. The MPs on the committee disagreed, with Mrs Wintringham saying, 'I never had a meeting without a demand to mention it,' and Gerald Hurst replying, 'I never heard it mentioned.' Richardson, Murray and Greig agreed with Mrs Wintringham.⁶⁸

Joint Committee evidence: the international picture

It was repeatedly asked by both supporters and opponents whether equal guardianship already existed elsewhere in the world, and if so whether it was successful. The situation in Scotland was more favourable to women: the joint committee took evidence from Miller Craig

⁶¹ *Proceedings*, pp468-470.

⁶² *Ibid*, p510.

⁶³ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1400-1, Greig. See Appendix 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* c1406, Astor.

⁶⁵ *Proceedings*, p212. See Appendix 4.

⁶⁶ For example NUSEC, WFL, National Council of Women, Six Point Group; unions of teachers, nurses, clerks and secretaries; Mothers Union, State Children's Association; Women's National Liberal Federation, Fabian Women's Group, Conservative Women's Reform Association; Union of Jewish Women, Free Church Women's Council.

⁶⁷ *Proceedings*, p509.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p346, p463.

on Scottish law which included the information that in Scotland the father was liable to maintain his children, a mother could obtain maintenance while still living with the father, and a parent could not will all property away from his children.⁶⁹

The main example given of equal guardianship operating successfully was in British Columbia.⁷⁰ Mr F C Wade, agent-general for British Columbia, gave evidence to the joint committee and was lavish in his praise for their 'wiping out one of the most abominable anomalies of British law, under which, for centuries, mothers have been deprived.'⁷¹

Opponents of equal guardianship were however scornful of using British Columbia as a model. Claud Schuster said 'There are 36 male persons to every 14 female persons and I suggest that makes a very considerable difference in the outlook.' Lord Terrington queried, 'A woman there has no competition and therefore is much more likely to get her own way?' Schuster replied, 'My experience is that they get their own way anyway.'⁷²

Eleanor Rathbone cited various countries including Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden, especially on the law of maintenance,⁷³ and experts testified as to how equal guardianship worked in different countries.⁷⁴ However the overall picture as to the success of equal guardianship was by no means clear. Equal guardianship laws in other countries had not led to a large number of serious court cases, which led to the "Catch 22" counter-argument that there was no need for such laws,⁷⁵ and it was by no means clear that the lack of such cases was because the law had successfully introduced equality, or because cases did not go to court for other reasons such as expense. Sir James Greig compiled a large digest of the situation throughout the world in detail, but he admitted he did not have information as to how well the law worked in all these countries.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp355-361.

⁷⁰ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1401, Greig.

⁷¹ *Proceedings*, p330.

⁷² Ibid, p393.

⁷³ Ibid, p337.

⁷⁴ For example in Holland, New Zealand, and New York. *Proceedings*, p367, pp443-4, p417.

⁷⁵ For example by Sir Paul Ogden Lawrence. *Proceedings*, p407.

⁷⁶ *Proceedings*, p449.

Joint Committee evidence: The maintenance issue

All the equal guardianship bills from 1921 included provision for women to claim maintenance. The Lord Chancellor thought that forcing fathers to pay maintenance was 'a most insulting thing... as if he had had a bastard child,'⁷⁷ and some otherwise sympathetic MPs expressed apprehension at taking the wages of working men.⁷⁸ A parallel was drawn with defaulting soldiers where deductions were made from their pay;⁷⁹ Eleanor Rathbone referred to seaman's allowances attached by Poor Law officials when their families claimed relief,⁸⁰ and to wartime separation allowances deducted from servicemen's pay.⁸¹ Sir Ernley Blackwall, from the Home Office, claimed that women asking for separation and maintenance orders were often murdered, although committee members were sceptical about this as an argument, concluding, 'The moral for wives would appear to be that it is better to submit to persistent cruelty rather than go to the court to ask the court to protect her.'⁸²

However, some who opposed equal guardianship nevertheless admitted there was a need for improvement in the laws of maintenance, including some of the hostile Lords on the joint committee.⁸³ As Schuster wrote afterwards, 'the committee to my surprise were not impressed by Blackwall's evidence and are practically unanimous in favour of altering the law so as to give the woman a right to a maintenance order although she has not left her husband's roof. It is no use arguing this point any further.'⁸⁴ Hubback's argument that, 'It would be quite a hollow thing to give the mother the rights of custody without at the same time giving her the rights of maintenance,'⁸⁵ won through.

⁷⁷ HL Deb 26 Mar 1923 vol 53 c634, Lord Chancellor.

⁷⁸ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1413, Walter Robert Smith (Labour).

⁷⁹ Ibid c1422, George Roberts (Coalition Labour).

⁸⁰ *Proceedings*, p343.

⁸¹ Ibid, p349.

⁸² *Proceedings*, p502, Gerald Hurst.

⁸³ HL Deb, 9 Jul 1924 vol 58 c358, Earl of Wemyss.

⁸⁴ TNA, LCO 2/757. Schuster to Sir Frederick Liddell, 31 Jul 1923.

⁸⁵ *Proceedings*, p509.

Joint Committee evidence: the case against

There was a huge amount of fiercely argued opposition to equal guardianship from representatives of the legal profession and civil servants. The main argument was that one person should be in charge of the children because, ultimately, if the mother and father disagreed over something trivial, it was better for one of them to have the final say rather than go to court over it. The committee were concerned about the possibility that equal guardianship would lead to frivolous applications to the courts, for example if parents disagreed whether a child should go to Oxford or Cambridge,⁸⁶ or other aspects of education and religion.⁸⁷ Such arguments ignored the fact that normally such domestic differences were resolved all the time, and that only became problematic in serious situations such as a marriage ending.

The attitude of Lord Onslow, one of the committee members, was 'I do think that this principle of equal guardianship is an impossible one... I have no sympathy whatever with the women's societies who wish to have a share in the guardianship, merely because they wish to be equal with men.' Onslow referred to his fellow committee member Askwith, who supported equal guardianship; 'his view is purely the Suffragette point of view, if I may so put it.'⁸⁸

Civil servants argued against the bill on practical grounds rather than on principle. Mr M L Gwyer, on behalf of the Minister of Health, listed numerous legislative changes that would have to be made in its wake on subjects including notification of births, vaccination, education and the poor laws.⁸⁹ Adrian Hassard-Short, Secretary of the Poor Persons Department of the Law Courts, argued that equality would not help women whose husbands simply refused to pay maintenance; the men went to prison, the debt was cancelled and the women were left in exactly the same position as before.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid, p314.

⁸⁷ HC Deb 6 May 1921 vol 141 c1415-6, Hurst.

⁸⁸ TNA, HO 45/11566. Lord Onslow observations on the bill, 22 Jul 1922.

⁸⁹ *Proceedings*, p373.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p414.

A number of judges were opposed to equal guardianship. Opinions of the Judges of the Chancery Division were summarised by Sir Paul Ogden Lawrence.⁹¹ Lawrence and three others were against the Bill, one expressed no opinion, and only one was in favour.⁹² Chief Magistrate Sir Chartres Biron was utterly against the principle of the bill; 'A great deal of this talk about equality of the sexes is obviously fallacious.' Mrs Wintringham tried to make a point about the importance of the women's contribution to the household, to which Biron said 'Nothing like the same figure as the husband. What does she do? She puts the children to bed... I think, to put it crudely, that the person who pays the piper should call the tune.' Biron's opinion of women was low.⁹³ Not all magistrates agreed with Biron; Cecil Chapman, a London magistrate for 24 years, spoke on how the character of the parents was most important, and that he did not think there would be a substantial increase in work of courts.⁹⁴ Others expressed scorn at the idea of equal guardianship with the more insidious argument that women were in charge anyway. Sir Paul Ogden Lawrence: 'I cannot myself conceive that the mother is not in every household in which she is worthy of it the person who rules supreme.'⁹⁵

The committee conclusion: stalemate

The draft report by Lord Wemyss shows the direction he wanted to steer the committee, and the proceedings show their internal disagreement. It was discussed on 30 July 1923, just a few days before Parliament adjourned for the summer recess.⁹⁶ Wemyss's draft summarised the cases for and against equal guardianship and custody as outlined by the various witnesses. It

⁹¹ Sir Paul Ogden Lawrence had been made a judge in 1918, and chaired two committees on legal aid in 1919 and 1923. G R Rubin, 'Lawrence, Sir Paul Ogden (1861–1952)', *ODNB*.

⁹² *Proceedings*, p401, p406.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p471, p474, p478, p481. In 1928 Biron would rule on the trial of Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* for obscenity.

⁹⁴ *Proceedings*, p425. Chapman was on the executive committee of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage before the First World War, and was also a supporter of divorce law reform. Angela V John, 'Between the cause and the courts: the curious case of Cecil Chapman' in *A suffrage reader: charting directions in British suffrage history* (eds Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini, London: Leicester University Press, 2000).

⁹⁵ *Proceedings*, p410.

⁹⁶ Parliament adjourned on 2 Aug 1923 and did not return until 13 Nov (*Journal of the House of Commons*, vol 178).

then recommended amendments to custody and maintenance laws, but did not support the crucial point of equal guardianship because:

The mate of a ship may be as good or better seaman than the captain but he must either take his place and act in his stead, or else remain the second in command...

Divided counsels in bad weather would make for shipwreck, even though both parties aspired to save the ship.⁹⁷

However Wemyss did not get his way; the Committee did not agree these recommendations. Lord Askwith moved an entirely different draft report, and when the committee voted on Wemyss's recommendations they were rejected, five votes to six.⁹⁸ The committee adjourned at this point for the summer and never returned.⁹⁹ A note in the Home Office file shows Onslow reporting that Askwith's draft report 'now holds the field' and that any voting when the committee reassembled would be 6-6 with a mixture of MPs and peers on both sides, and a female MP on each side. Onslow wanted to shelve the whole issue.¹⁰⁰ Correspondence between Schuster and Colin Davidson, the Clerk to the Committee, also shows the extent of disagreement between Wemyss and Askwith.¹⁰¹

The Committee was not reconvened because of lack of time due to the general election called in 1923.¹⁰² As the Earl of Wemyss said, the two committees in 1922 and 1923 'showed considerably more vitality than the Parliaments which appointed them.' Wemyss claimed that 'our differences were more apparent than real, and that we might easily have built a bridge...

⁹⁷ *Proceedings*, p304.

⁹⁸ In favour of Wemyss's recommendations were Wemyss, Earl of Onslow, Duke of Northumberland, Lord MacDonnell and Mrs Philipson. Against were Lord Askwith, Lord Terrington, Gerald Hurst, Robert Murray, Robert Richardson and Mrs Wintringham.

⁹⁹ Parliament sat for only a few days in November before proroguing for the general election in December. *Journal of the House of Commons*, vol 178.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, HO 45/11566. Note dated 22 Oct 1923 by 'HHCP.'

¹⁰¹ TNA, LCO 2/757. Davidson to Schuster, 26 Oct 1923. Schuster had asked Davidson for the record of the committee's private discussion, to which Davidson replied, 'I'm afraid it doesn't exist', as it was established practice to send the shorthand writer out of the room during private deliberation.

¹⁰² 'Owing to the exigencies of the political crisis of the time, the Report was never agreed to.' HL Deb 3 Jun 1924 vol 57 c804, Marquess of Salisbury (Conservative).

But... Parliament came to an end and the Bill could not go on.¹⁰³ There was some truth in this: Schuster wrote on 10 October 1923, 'I think that it is really possible to make a bargain with the promoters which would take some of the sting out of the present proposals.'¹⁰⁴

1924: Mrs Wintringham, Eva Hubback and Claud Schuster

In 1924, under a new minority Labour government, Mrs Wintringham introduced a private members' bill.¹⁰⁵ She spoke, 'I realise I am addressing men chiefly, and I want them for a few minutes, in considering the position of the law as it stands at present, to take a mental somersault. I want them to view it from the standpoint of the woman who passionately desires the guardianship and the ownership of her own child.'¹⁰⁶ Margaret Wintringham, the second woman MP to take her seat, had first been elected in a by-election in 1921 and supported many issues campaigned for by women's organisations.¹⁰⁷ By 1924 there were eight women MPs in the Commons, and equal guardianship had their cross-party support. Lady Terrington (Liberal) remarked 'I was able to advise someone in another place as to whether it was not a good thing to bring in this Bill.'¹⁰⁸ Her husband had been on the Joint Committee. Dorothy Jewson and Lady Terrington ('There are thousands of women all over the country today hoping, and listening, probably, and waiting for the papers tonight, to ascertain if this bill has had a Second Reading,') were firm in their support for equal guardianship. The Duchess of Atholl also spoke in favour, saying she was delighted the bill was received in such a 'friendly

¹⁰³ Ibid c.795. Earl of Wemyss.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, LCO 2/757. Claud Schuster to Sir Frederick Liddell, 10 Oct 1923.

¹⁰⁵ Supported by Nancy Astor, Sir Robert Newman and Mr Philip Richardson (Conservative), Lady Terrington, Isaac Foot, Frederick Linfield, Dr Murray, John Simpson, and John Emlyn-Jones (all Liberal), and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence (Labour).

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb 4 Apr 1924 vol 171 c 2660. Mrs Wintringham. Wintringham did not herself have children; this was never openly referred to in any discussion, apparently her status as a woman being enough to give her expertise in the subject. By contrast Mabel Philipson, who was always decidedly more sceptical about equal guardianship, was a mother.

¹⁰⁷ Elaine Harrison, 'Wintringham, Margaret (1879–1955)', *ODNB*.

¹⁰⁸ HC Deb 4 Apr 1924 vol 171 c2673, Lady Terrington. Her husband was Harold James Selborne Woodhouse, 2nd Baron Terrington.

spirit.¹⁰⁹ Mabel Philipson was more lukewarm: 'We should speak not only of the women and the children's interests; the men's interest as well must be considered in this matter,'¹¹⁰ Philipson had been a member of the joint committee, where she had voted for Wemyss's original draft report rather than Askwith's alternative. She did express opinions in favour of mothers: 'If there is to be any right it should be the mother's right,' and 'I am not against the bill', but she clearly had serious reservations about how it would work, in particular about giving outsiders 'a right of interference between mother and father and child.'¹¹¹

The contribution of women MPs was noted by several men. Hugh Edwards declared 'When I heard my hon. Friend's speech today [Wintringham] I felt that those who had supported the extension of the franchise to women had been absolutely justified in their action.' Another MP remarked that it was not so many years ago that women had been fighting for votes: 'I think we are all glad that they have had that right given to them, and now we find them in the arena of politics, the arena of law, in medicine, and in almost every other profession, on an equality with men.'¹¹²

The Labour government's Cabinet Committee of Home Affairs were in favour of the principle of equal guardianship but thought further discussion was needed on legal and practical objections.¹¹³ Conferences were held between the promoters of the bill¹¹⁴ and a group of officials including Schuster, Sir Frederick Liddell (Parliamentary Counsel) and Sir Ernley Blackwell (Legal Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Home Office). Together they held at least two meetings at which they thrashed out the details of a draft government bill.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Ibid c2468, Dorothy Jewson (Labour); c2673, Lady Terrington; c2697, Duchess of Atholl (Conservative).

¹¹⁰ Ibid c2674, Philipson. Mabel Philipson (Conservative) was an actress and the third woman to be elected to Parliament, in her husband Hilton Philipson's constituency after he was unseated for fraud. Duncan Sutherland, 'Philipson, Mabel (1887–1951)', *ODNB*.

¹¹¹ *Proceedings*, p385, p515.

¹¹² HC Deb 4 Apr 1924 vol 171 c2686, Hugh Edwards; c2706, Charles Rudkin (Liberal).

¹¹³ TNA, LCO 2/758. HAC 9(24) 4 Apr 1924.

¹¹⁴ Lord Askwith, Eva Hubback, Mrs Wintringham, Isaac Foot and Leslie Burgin.

¹¹⁵ TNA, HO 45/11982. Note of meeting 14 Apr 1924, and reference to another such meeting on 1 May 1924.

The influence of Wintringham and her fellow promoters on the government bill is made plain in a letter Schuster later wrote: 'I do not like the idea of touching clause 1, the wording of which was hammered out inch by inch between ourselves and the promoters of Mrs Wintringham's bill.'¹¹⁶ Of course the promoters' position was not strong in that the government could kill their bill easily. As an official wrote to the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, Mrs Wintringham's bill was with Standing Committee A, 'where it will presumably die of overcrowding. So the Government are really in the position of saying to Mrs Wintringham "if you don't support our bill we will leave you to your own and you know quite well that yours doesn't stand an earthly chance of making progress."' ¹¹⁷ Eventually the promoters agreed to support the government bill,¹¹⁸ so the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rhys Davies) was able to say in the Commons at the debate on Mrs. Wintringham's bill, 'The Government will bring in a Measure embodying the main principles of this Bill in another place.'¹¹⁹

Whether the government bill should include empowering Courts to order maintenance was contentious, and this was referred to the full cabinet.¹²⁰ The cabinet's memorandum referred to the 'prolonged discussions' previously, explained that the draft Bill 'represents the absolute minimum necessary to secure anything like agreement in the House of Commons', and 'in view of the pledges given on behalf of the Labour Party during and before the Election and of the attitude of other Parties as disclosed by the speeches on the second reading of Mrs Wintringham's bill, it seems highly desirable that early steps should be taken to give effect to the compromise now arrived at.'¹²¹ After a long discussion, the cabinet agreed, 'That, in view of the extent to which the Government was pledged to the promoters of the earlier Private Bill on the subject, the Guardianship of Infants bill when introduced should contain clause 3 [on

¹¹⁶ TNA, LCO 2/758. Schuster to Sir Francis Greer, 30 May 1924.

¹¹⁷ TNA, PRO 30/69/212. Buckland, Home Office, to the Prime Minister, 9 May 1925.

¹¹⁸ TNA, LCO 2/758. HAC 10(24) 2 May 1924.

¹¹⁹ HC Deb 4 Apr 1924 vol 171 c2691, John Rhys Davies (Labour).

¹²⁰ TNA, LCO 2/758. HAC 11(24) 8 May 1924.

¹²¹ TNA, Annex to CP 287 (24). 'Agreed Memo by Members of the Committee appointed by the Home Secretary on the Guardianship of Infants negotiations.'

maintenance orders].¹²² This openly acknowledges the role of the promoters; Wintringham and NUSEC who were supporting her. Schuster later referred to this clause as 'the price of peace',¹²³ suggesting intense pressure.

The government bill was introduced in the House of Lords, where the Lord Chancellor explained how they had consulted with Mrs Wintringham. He stressed that the welfare of the child was the first consideration and how the bill built on the work of the Joint Committees. The Earl of Wemyss pronounced, 'This Bill practically embodies the compromise that we should have arrived at.'¹²⁴ Indeed the role played by the House of Lords in getting equal guardianship on the agenda was crucial; Askwith said, 'For the last three years your Lordships have had Bills before you, and have almost been hammering at the gates of the other place with a view of getting something through on this important matter.'¹²⁵ Spouses of women MPs spoke up for the Bill, including Viscount Astor and Lord Terrington.¹²⁶

One big change was that wives could apply for separation orders while still living with their husbands, which would come into effect when they left; the idea was to give such wives confidence to leave because they knew they would not be destitute. This was stressed heavily by the governments in both 1924 and 1925 as a major addition to all previous bills. Henry Slessor said 'We are here giving to married women a right which they have never possessed before – and a very valuable one!'¹²⁷ It had been advocated by Eleanor Rathbone.¹²⁸

Claud Schuster and Eva Hubback, on behalf of NUSEC, continued to negotiate the drafting of the bill throughout 1924. By this time they had built up a good working relationship; Hubback wrote to Schuster at one point, 'It was an amusing debate on the second reading; the speakers

¹²² TNA, LCO 2/758. Cabinet 32(24) 15 May 1924.

¹²³ Ibid, Claud Schuster to Sir Francis Greer, 4 June 1924.

¹²⁴ HL Deb 3 Jun 1924 vol 57 c792, Lord Chancellor; c796, Earl of Wemyss.

¹²⁵ HL Deb 26 May 1925 vol 61 c523, Lord Askwith.

¹²⁶ HL Deb 9 Jul 1924 vol 58 c363, Viscount Astor; c364, Lord Terrington.

¹²⁷ HC Deb 4 Mar 1925 vol 181 c536, Sir Henry Herman Slessor. Slessor was solicitor-general in Ramsay MacDonald's 1924 Labour government.

¹²⁸ *Proceedings*, p350.

all being very true to type.¹²⁹ It was a remarkable turnaround for Schuster, who only two years earlier had declared that the principle of equal guardianship was 'nonsense',¹³⁰ yet was now taking Hubback's suggestions and comments seriously. Schuster's biographers identify 'a change in his opinion' of the position of women in society during the 1920s, due to contact with Hubback, stating, 'Tiresome she was at first but Schuster's irritation developed over some years into respect for this remarkable woman and her ability was recognised.'¹³¹ Stephen Cretney gives credit to Eva Hubback for 'securing the confidence – if not always the agreement – of influential civil servants,' for example Schuster.¹³²

NUSEC were actually in an awkward position, needing to persuade their members to support the government bill. A pamphlet written by Hubback explored three areas in which it fell short of Mrs Wintringham's bill. Firstly, it did not provide machinery for carrying out the principle of equal rights except in cases that could already be brought to Court, secondly, it did not impose equal responsibilities in matters such as vaccination and education; thirdly, it did not enable an order for custody or maintenance to be enforced while parents were living together nor increase facilities for enforcing maintenance payments via attachment of wages: 'These are serious defects.'¹³³ However it concluded, 'The Government bill contains provisions far too valuable in themselves to turn down, and in the opinion of many will serve as a jumping-off ground in the future for the attainment of the full measure of reform required.'¹³⁴ Despite NUSEC's undoubted hard work and eventual achievements, not all women's organisations approved of the bill. There was a demonstration in Trafalgar Square on 5 July 1924 against the government bill by the WFL, the Six Point Group and others. *The Vote*, the organ of the WFL,

¹²⁹ TNA, LCO 2/758. Hubback to Schuster, 5 Jun 1924.

¹³⁰ Ibid, Schuster to the Lord Chancellor, 1 Mar 1922.

¹³¹ Jean Graham Hall and Douglas F Martin, *Yes Lord Chancellor: A Biography of Lord Schuster* (Chichester, West Sussex: Barry Rose Law Publishers, 2003), pp121-129. Hall and Martin also trace Schuster's assistance with other pieces of legislation supported by NUSEC including the Inheritance (Family Provision) Act 1938.

¹³² Cretney, *Family law*, pp793-4.

¹³³ WL, 2/NSE/X/3/2/1. *The Government's Guardianship of Infants bill 1924* by Eva Hubback.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

referred to the bill 'as great a sham, delusion and snare in regard to the principle of equality as the Sex Disqualification Removal Act 1919.'¹³⁵

In Parliament, opposition to equal guardianship was not strong enough seriously to impede the bill in either the Commons or Lords by this date. Sir Charles Wilson said, 'I think it ought to be called the Promotion of Domestic Strife Bill,' which led a fellow Conservative to refer dryly to his personal situation: 'The opposition to the Bill comes only from those who have been married three times.'¹³⁶ In the Lords, Banbury led the opposition in 1924 just as he had as in the Commons in 1921: 'Men and women... are not equal, they never will be equal, they were not made equal and you cannot make them equal.' He forced a division on one wrecking amendment, but lost by 70 votes to 6.¹³⁷

However, the government bill's progress was halted by the fall of the Labour government during autumn 1924. Hubback wrote to Schuster on 19 November, 'Our joint labours of last session appear to have been entirely in vain owing to the turn of events!' She was careful to add that the women's organisations still wanted a government bill, and if one was not forthcoming they would seek a private members' bill.¹³⁸ Enough consensus had been reached that in 1925 the Conservative government re-introduced it readily as 'absolutely uncontroversial'¹³⁹ – which had not been the case even one year earlier.

1925: 'We do not say it is perfect'

In 1925 the Home Office, rather than the Lord Chancellor's Office, led on the bill (as it was introduced in the Commons rather than the Lords) and Hubback evidently found the officials there harder to deal with than Schuster. Schuster kept in touch, writing to the Home Office, 'I still take a more or less distant interest in my children though they have per subsequens

¹³⁵ TNA, HO 45/11982. To which an annotation has been made by a civil servant '!!! One would have thought women had done pretty well out of it.'

¹³⁶ HC Deb 4 Apr 1924 vol 171 c2675, Sir Charles Henry Wilson (Conservative); c2687, Annesley Somerville (Conservative).

¹³⁷ HL Deb 9 July 1924 vol 58 c365, Lord Banbury of Southam; c371.

¹³⁸ TNA, LCO 2/758. Eva Hubback to Claud Schuster, 19 Nov 1924.

¹³⁹ HC Deb 4 Mar 1925 vol 181 c532-3, Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Godfrey Locker-Lampson).

matrimonium changed their status.¹⁴⁰ At one point Hubback appealed to Schuster after being stalled by the Home Office, during a squabble over an amendment.¹⁴¹ Schuster wrote to the Home Office official, 'Perhaps you could put me in a position to send a civil answer to Mrs Hubback. It is desirable to keep these people on our side for as long as possible.'¹⁴² Schuster also gave credit to Hubback for her efforts and achievements, writing after the committee stage in the Lords on 19 June 1925, 'You appear to have been more successful in the House yesterday than I had anticipated to be possible.'¹⁴³

The residual opposition in Parliament to equal guardianship was now tiny. 'There are many of us... who think that the whole Bill root and branch is wrong,'¹⁴⁴ said Henry Craik, but he was in the minority. As Melinda Haunton points out, equal guardianship was by now an easy bill for even a Conservative government to pass, one of a 'pent up wave' of family bills, frustrated by circumstance more than opposition.¹⁴⁵ Nancy Astor tried to introduce a new clause at committee stage, which clearly stated that a mother would have 'guardianship and custody.. equal authority, rights and responsibilities', at all times and not just when in dispute (a point previously in Mrs Wintringham's 1924 bill and Lord Askwith's 1922 bill). This foundered on the fear that the courts would be bogged down on trivial matters. Locker-Lampson for the government was clear that it would be unlikely to pass at report stage, 'and I am certain that it would be thrown out in another place [the Lords], and all the efforts... of all the women's societies... would come to nought.' Astor dropped it rather than risk losing the bill.¹⁴⁶ The Act did not go as far as some would have liked, but further than others wanted; a classic

¹⁴⁰ TNA, LCO 2/759. Schuster to Sir Frederick Liddell, 4 Feb 1925.

¹⁴¹ TNA, HO 45/12054. Hubback to John Anderson, 3 Apr 1925

¹⁴² Ibid, Schuster to John Anderson, 3 Apr 1925.

¹⁴³ TNA, LCO 2/759. Schuster to Hubback, 19 Jun 1925.

¹⁴⁴ HC Deb 8 Apr 1925 vol 182 c2337, Craik.

¹⁴⁵ Haunton, 'Conservatism and society', pp83-84.

¹⁴⁶ Standing Committee Debates [hereafter SC Deb] (A) 24 Mar 1925 c75, Viscountess Astor; c77, Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Godfrey Locker-Lampson); c80, Viscountess Astor.

compromise. Ellen Wilkinson said, 'we do not say that it is perfect... on the whole we welcome this Bill and we hope it will go through.'¹⁴⁷

Significance of the Act

Despite all the time and effort that had gone into drafting the bill, an omission was swiftly discovered. A magistrate pointed out in an early court case in January 1926 that it gave mothers rights to apply for jurisdiction but not fathers. Eva Hubback protested that fathers already had this right as a matter of common law. Nevertheless, this was corrected by the Administration of Justice Act 1928 section 16. Apart from this, most of the issues connected with the implementation of the Act, as far as the Home Office were concerned, were about cases where magistrates gave permission for minors to marry. This later included a flurry of cases during the Second World War where parents were dead or ill or absent because of the war.¹⁴⁸

One issue where inequalities remained after 1925 was that of vaccination. A father who objected to vaccinating a child could exempt it by completing a conscientious objection form, and health officials were worried about the effect of allowing mothers to do the same. The possible effect of equal guardianship on the Vaccination Acts was considered as early as 1921 by civil servants. A lengthy note by Richard J Reece, dated 8 December 1921, included the following opinion: 'Mothers are potential anti-vaccinators: and except among the upper class of society they are almost without exception opposed to vaccination.'¹⁴⁹ As a result there was no provision for amending the Vaccination Acts as part of equal guardianship. There were cases immediately after the Equal Guardianship Act was passed where mothers tried to claim exemption and were told they could not. This remained an issue for women's organisations. The WFL wrote to Neville Chamberlain, Minister for Health, about it on 29 April 1926.¹⁵⁰ Questions were asked in the House of Commons on 20 May 1926 and again on 4 July 1929, but the government had no intention of tackling this issue.

¹⁴⁷ HC Deb 4 Mar 1925 vol 181 c534. Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Locker-Lampson); c540-1. Ellen Wilkinson (Labour).

¹⁴⁸ TNA, HO 45/22931.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, MH 53/53.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, MH 55/404. Includes a case reported as early as 30 Dec 1925.

Overall, Stephen Cretney concludes, 'The Guardianship of Infants Act... did not create the legal equality which NUSEC had claimed to be the "keystone" of its proposals.' The benefits of the Act only applied in the event of a court order, so a mother still did not have legal authority over her child unless she went to court to obtain it. Full equal guardianship outside the court process had to wait until 1973. However, this is not to say that the 1925 Act made no difference. The role of the courts was greatly increased as working-class women could now bring their case to a magistrates' court, where the Act provided for a mother to have the same power as a father, with the welfare of the child being paramount. And women did make use of this: applications to magistrates courts for equal guardianship by women rose steadily over the next 20 years.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Cretney, *Family law*, pp569-575. There were 629 applications for equal guardianship in magistrates' courts in 1928, 1169 in 1938, and 6066 in 1948.

Chapter Four

The path to equal franchise: the passage of the Equal Franchise Act 1928, and earlier attempts

The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 was passed on 2 July 1928:

for the purpose of providing that the parliamentary franchise shall be the same for men and women.¹

It removed the limits placed on women voting in the Representation of the People Act 1918, namely the age limit of 30 and the possession or husband's possession of the local government franchise. Men and women now had the same qualifications, based on residence, business premises, or being the husband or wife of a person with a business premise qualification. Women were also entitled to the university franchise if they had passed the examinations required, even if the university did not admit women to degrees.² The Act also equalised the local government franchise and other consequential issues.³

Ray Strachey declared, 'With the passage of this Act the last glaring inequality in the legal position of women was abolished.'⁴ Yet historians tend to skip over it, preferring to concentrate on women's struggle for the vote before 1914, culminating usually with the victory of 1918. The historians who carry the story on to 1928 usually do this in a few words, as an appendix to 1918, rather than looking at the 1928 Act in itself. The few who have studied 1928 in more detail have concentrated on the actions of women's groups⁵ and the Conservative government's gradual acceptance of the need for equal franchise despite press

¹ *Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, 1928*, ch 12.

² Cambridge did not admit women to degrees until 1948. Oxford did, following the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 (see chapter 2).

³ Consequential issues included reducing the maximum scale of election expenses from seven pence to sixpence per voter, and compiling the electoral register in 1929 so as to bring the Act into force as soon as possible.

⁴ Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": a short history of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: Virago, 1928 (reprinted 1978)), p384.

⁵ Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and power: the women's movement, 1918-1928* (London: I B Tauris, 1997). Law covers the build up to equal franchise in great detail including all the previous attempts at legislation, but the focus is almost exclusively on the women's movement and not on the actions of Parliament or government. For example, she does not mention the Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee 1926-1927.

opposition to the 'flapper' vote,⁶ rather than the parliamentary process which is assumed to have been uneventful.⁷ The fullest account of the path to equal franchise can be found in D E Butler's *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918*, but only as a small part of the story of the electoral system over a long period of time.⁸

Equal Franchise in Parliament, 1919-1928

The 1928 Act cannot be studied in isolation. The issue of equal franchise was a thorn in the side of successive governments from 1918 until Baldwin's Conservative government finally introduced its bill in 1928. As Baldwin remarked in 1925, he could think of no other subject which had been so constantly brought forward by private members'. 'Whether it be the divine conviction that lies in their breasts, or whether it be some hope that they may acquire merit in the eyes of the new voters... or... they have been persecuted beyond endurance by societies, I cannot say.'⁹ Between 1919 and 1927 there was not one year when an equal franchise bill did not come before Parliament, and in some years there were more than one. The major ones have been outlined by historians,¹⁰ but a full list has been lacking until now.¹¹

Session	Bill title & presenter	Parliamentary progress
1919	Women's Emancipation bill (HC Bill 38). Presented by Benjamin Spoor (Labour).	Passed through Commons. Division at 3rd reading passed 100 to 85. Fell at second reading in Lords.

⁶ Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd ed 2000), pp112-113. Adrian Bingham, "'Stop the Flapper Vote Folly': Lord Rothermere, the Daily Mail, and the Equalization of the Franchise 1927-28", pp17-37 in *Twentieth Century British History* 13(1), 2002. David Close, 'The Collapse of Resistance to Democracy: Conservatives, Adult Suffrage and Second Chamber Reform, 1911-1928', pp893-918 in *Historical Journal* 20(4), 1977. Melinda Alison Haunton, 'Conservatism and society: aspects of government policy 1924-1929', Royal Holloway, University of London, PhD thesis (2002).

⁷ For example, 'The Bill passed into law relatively smoothly in 1928.' Pugh, *Women and the women's movement*, p113. 'The Bill itself passed without difficulty.' Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: a biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p468. Among contemporaries, 'The Act of 1928... came virtually without effort.' Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co, 1971), p608. Ray Strachey covers the passage of the Act in just one page in *The Cause*.

⁸ David Butler, *The electoral system in Britain since 1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp15-38.

⁹ HC Deb 20 Feb 1925 vol 180 c1561, Prime Minister (Stanley Baldwin, Conservative).

¹⁰ Pugh, *Women and the women's movement*, p112.

¹¹ Butler, *The electoral system in Britain*, who otherwise has the most complete list, fails to mention the bills which were introduced but did not get a second reading. This includes Sir Park Goff's bill of 1920.

1920	Representation of the People bill (HC bill 7). Presented by Thomas Grundy (Labour).	Passed second reading 122 to 38. Bill abandoned in standing committee on grounds that bill had no chance of passing into law.
	Women's Franchise bill (HC bill 23). Presented by Sir Park Goff (Conservative).	No second reading; the Speaker ruled it too similar to Grundy's bill.
1921	Representation of the People bill (HC bill 9). Presented by Walter Smith (Labour).	No second reading.
1922	Representation of the People bill (HC bill 37). Presented by Walter Smith (Labour).	No second reading.
	Women's Enfranchisement bill (HC bill 48). Presented by Lord Robert Cecil (Independent Conservative).	Motion passed under Ten Minute Rule bill, 208 to 60.
1923	Women's Enfranchisement bill (HC bill 102). Presented by Isaac Foot (Liberal).	Motion passed under Ten Minute Rule. No division.
1924	Representation of the People bill (HC bill 4). Presented by William M Adamson (Labour). Standing Committee A report (HC 104), bill reprinted after committee stage (HC bill 173).	Passed second reading; an amendment asking for a conference defeated 288 to 72. Passed committee stage and government gave support, but ran out of time before government fell.
	Representation of the People bill no 3 (HC bill 3). Presented by Hugh Edwards (Constitutionalist). (Not printed).	No second reading.
1925	Representation of the People bill (HC bill 24). Presented by William Whiteley (Labour).	Fell at second reading, deemed too early in the new Parliament to alter franchise. Division lost 153 to 220.
1926	Equalisation of the Franchise bill (HC bill 34). Presented by William Wedgwood Benn (Liberal, joined Labour March 1927).	No second reading.
1927	Representation of the People bill (HC bill 12). Presented by Mr Haden Guest. (Labour, though left party Feb 1927).	No second reading.
1928	Equal Franchise bill. Conservative government bill presented by the Home Secretary, Joynson-Hicks.	Passed as Equal Franchise Act.

Table 4.1 - Equal Franchise bills, 1919-1928

So although there were no fewer than twelve equal franchise bills in nine years between 1919 and 1927, presented by MPs from all parties, successive governments failed to find time either to allow a private members' bill to pass, or to introduce one of their own. An examination of

what happened may shed light not only on the equal franchise issue, but also on government attitudes to private members' bills in this period and the influence of pressure groups.

The early years

Equal franchise was proposed and debated before 1919, but always entangled in wider arguments about women's suffrage. For example, during the debates on the Representation of the People Bill in 1918, equal franchise was proposed by some notorious opponents of the bill in a vain attempt to use it to defeat women's suffrage altogether. The spectacle of Hugh Cecil,¹² Frederick Banbury, Charles Hobhouse and Basil Peto voting against women's suffrage on one day and supporting votes for women at 21 the next day, fooled nobody. As Philip Snowden remarked, 'By their vote last night they declared that they considered the enfranchisement of one woman to be an evil... today ... they want as much of that evil as they possibly can get.'¹³ It was only after the Representation of the People Act 1918 was safely on the statute book and the principle of women's suffrage conceded, that equal franchise could be discussed on its own merits. The first attempt was Labour's Women's Emancipation Bill in 1919, but this was replaced by the government's Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act which did not deal with the franchise.¹⁴

1920: Grundy and Goff: falling between two stools

1920 was the year of two different bills, that of Thomas Grundy (Labour) and Sir Park Goff (Conservative). Both were presented on 13 February but had very different fates. Grundy's bill had its second reading on 27 February and passed decisively through its motion for closure with 122 votes to 38. The government allowed a free vote,¹⁵ although they would have preferred it to be talked out.¹⁶ Grundy,¹⁷ arriving from his sickbed, covered the usual

¹² Conservative. Brother of Lord Robert Cecil, but without Robert's sympathies to women's suffrage.

¹³ HC Deb 20 Jun 1917 vol 94 cc1837-1839, Philip Snowden (Labour). The government made it clear that if the equal franchise amendment was passed then the whole bill would fall, so supporters such as Snowden voted against it.

¹⁴ See Chapter 2.

¹⁵ HC Deb 27 Feb 1920 vol 125 c2090, Minister for Health (Christopher Addison).

¹⁶ Robert Sanders, a government whip, recorded, 'It was a case of trying to talk the Bill out and I put in a 25-minute speech at very short notice.' Robert Sanders Bayford, *Real old Tory politics: the political diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, ed John Ramsden (London: Historian's Press, 1984). Entry for 29 Feb 1920, p136.

arguments including that it was deserved because of women's efforts in the war. In 1920 the war was sufficiently recent still to be a forceful argument. Although there was little outright opposition, some MPs did object to the age of 21.¹⁸ Gideon Murray was perhaps the first MP to advocate equal franchise at age 25,¹⁹ a suggestion which became a major talking point in later years.

The debate on Grundy's bill was also notable as the first ever women's franchise bill debate at which a woman MP was present, Nancy Astor. As Grundy said, 'The women have sent at least one Member into this House, and I am positively sure that her presence adds grace and charm to this assembly.'²⁰ Astor had made her maiden speech just three days earlier. She spoke on Grundy's bill, full of thanks and reassurance about women voters; referred to her postbag, 'thousands [of letters]... on a high level, and of such hope, both spiritual and material.'²¹ *The Times* recorded, 'she must have been glad that the House took her speech not as a curiosity but on its merits... there was wit and some shrewd observation.'²² *The Vote* was enthusiastic: 'All right-minded women will feel grateful to their spirited and fearless champion who, in these early days of her political experience, while still, in a sense, on trial in the House, sprang to her feet because she felt that she must.'²³

Grundy's bill, supported by Labour MPs noted for their sympathy with franchise reform,²⁴ covered equal franchise and other electoral reform issues.²⁵ These issues, especially the

¹⁷ Thomas Walker Grundy was a former coal miner and checkweigher, and MP for the Rother Valley 1918-1942. He thus continued the tradition of coal-mining Labour MPs supporting equal franchise (see Chapter 2). M Stenton and S Lees, *Who's who of British members of Parliament* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976-1981).

¹⁸ HC Deb 27 Feb 1920 vol 125 c2125, John Hopkins (Conservative).

¹⁹ Ibid, c2978. Gideon Murray (Conservative). Cheryl Law states that the first Parliamentary debate in which the age limit of 25 was put forward was on 29 Feb 1924; Law, *Suffrage and power*, p196. This, however, is earlier.

²⁰ Ibid, c2071, Grundy.

²¹ HC Deb 27 Feb 1920 vol 125 c2112, Viscountess Astor. Astor was introduced into the Commons on 1 Dec 1919; her maiden speech on 24 Feb 1920 was on one of her pet topics, Liquor Traffic. HC Deb 24 Feb 1920 vol 125 cc1625-1631.

²² *The Times*, 28 Feb 1920.

²³ *The Vote*, 5 March 1920. In PA, ST/50.

²⁴ William Adamson, Arthur Henderson, Benjamin Spoor (who had introduced the Women's Emancipation Bill the previous year), J R Clynes, Thomas Shaw, Tyson Wilson and Colonel Wedgwood.

abolition of the business qualification, proved major stumbling blocks.²⁶ Some MPs claimed that they would support a simple equal franchise bill but not this bill, others that they would seek to amend it in committee.²⁷ Robert Sanders pointed out the long, controversial history of the plural vote and warned, 'Do not try to get a big thing like this through by speaking under the covers of the women's petticoats on a Friday afternoon.'²⁸

Grundy's bill was then effectively killed in Standing Committee D.²⁹ No debates were recorded, but the formal report and questions asked in the House give a sense of what happened. The committee included many outright opponents of the bill. Successive wrecking amendments attempted to set age limits of thirty, twenty-nine, twenty-five, twenty-four, 'not less than twenty-three years nor more than seventy-five years,' and to exclude 'women who do not pay rent and are unmarried.'³⁰ An attempt was made to withdraw everything except the equal franchise clause,³¹ but this was not enough to save it. The bill was effectively abandoned after the committee decided that it had no chance of passing into law. Mr Palmer asked, 'Is it the function of a committee upstairs to examine a bill or to strangle a bill?'³² Others were similarly outraged, including Samuel Hoare and Lord Robert Cecil, who said that the whole committee system had been brought into contempt, but Bonar Law, Leader of the House, stated that the same thing could have happened in the House.³³ The committee

²⁵ These issues included the abolition of university registration fees, naval and military voters (who were able to vote under the age of 21 if on war service), and the abolition of the business vote which allowed plural voting.

²⁶ *The Times*, 28 Feb 1920.

²⁷ HC Deb 27 Feb 1920 vol 125 c2123 Craik; c2135, Major John Molson (Conservative); c2123, Sir Robert Lynn (Ulster Unionist); c2135, Captain John Watson.

²⁸ Ibid. c2139, Robert Sanders. Plural voting would not be abolished until 1948.

²⁹ Butler refers to this as a 'private and protracted murder.' Butler, *The electoral system in Britain*, p37.

³⁰ *Report, Special Report and Proceedings of Standing Committee D on the Representation of the People Bill* (HC 113, 1920). The referral of bills to a standing committee was standard practice, but whips could assign hostile MPs to a standing committee for a bill they wished to try and stop. Opponents of equal franchise on the committee included Frederick Banbury and Lieutenant-Colonel Martin Archer-Shee (Conservative).

³¹ HC Deb 14 May 1920 vol 129 c931, Banbury.

³² Ibid. c577, Mr Palmer. This could be Brigadier-General George Palmer, Conservative MP for Westbury, or - probably more likely - Major Godfrey Palmer, Liberal MP for Jarrow.

³³ Ibid. c578, Leader of the House (Bonar Law).

carried on for another few weeks, and women's organisations including NUSEC did their best to press sympathetic MPs to help,³⁴ but to no avail. Standing Committee D made the following brief special report on 10 June: 'The Committee cannot with advantage proceed further with the consideration of the Representation of the People Bill,' and that was the end of that. NUSEC's annual report recorded that Grundy's bill had 'ended in a fiasco.... killed in Committee by what amounted to chicanery on the part of some of its opponents and to ignorance of Parliamentary procedure on the part of some of its supporters.'³⁵

The fate of Grundy's bill was perhaps particularly frustrating considering the experience of the alternative bill that session, Sir Park Goff's Women's Franchise bill. Supported by some long-standing advocates of women's causes from a variety of political parties,³⁶ Goff's bill sought simply to equalise the franchise. It therefore appealed to some MPs who balked at Grundy's bill with its wider ambitions; during the debate on Grundy's bill, a number referred approvingly to Goff's.³⁷ Goff himself³⁸ said that the only difference was that he was a bachelor while Grundy was married: 'I, as a bachelor, in spite of my many disappointments, am doing my best to prove that I am not vindictive, but on the contrary, have formed a higher opinion than ever of a good woman's judgment.'³⁹

However Goff's bill met an even more abrupt fate than Grundy's. At its second reading on 14 May the Speaker said that it could not be taken, as it was substantially the same as the Representation of the People Bill (Grundy's bill) now before a standing committee, and "'*Majus in se minus continuet*.'" The larger bill contains the smaller bill.'⁴⁰ When there was protest, Mr Speaker simply stated, 'The Chair, like the Pope, is infallible.' Goff's bill was therefore withdrawn, even though by 14 May the committee had already decided that Grundy's bill

³⁴ Letters from NUSEC to Wedgwood Benn, May 1928. PA, ST/50.

³⁵ WL, 2NSE/C/3. NUSEC Annual report for 1920.

³⁶ Henry Dalziel (Liberal), Captain Elliot, George Thorne, James Seddon (National Democratic), Lord Robert Cecil, Colonel Charles Burn (Con), Nancy Astor, William Brace (Labour from 1918), Wedgwood Benn and Godfrey Locker-Lampson.

³⁷ HC Deb 27 Feb 1920 vol 125 c2133 Frederick Charles Thomson (Conservative); c2142, Sanders.

³⁸ Sir Park Goff was a barrister and Conservative MP for Cleveland, Yorkshire, 1918-1923 (having defeated Herbert Samuel in the 1918 general election) and 1924-1929, and for Chatham, Rochester, 1931-1935. Stenton and Lees, *Who's who*.

³⁹ Ibid, c2118, Park Goff.

⁴⁰ HC Deb 14 May 1920 vol 129 c933, The Speaker (James Lowther).

should be dropped. Supporters of equal franchise in 1920 might have felt aggrieved that their cause had effectively fallen between two stools.

1921-1923: Labour bills & Ten Minute Rule attempts

Identical equal franchise bills were presented in 1921 and 1922 by Walter Smith.⁴¹ Very similar to Grundy's 1920 bill, they sought to confer the franchise on women at the age of 21 and assimilate the Parliamentary and local franchises. Their introduction reflects the fact that the Labour party was the only party at this time explicitly supporting the equal franchise.⁴² Curiously, the Smith bills seem to have been ignored by historians of the women's movement, who have focussed instead on the subsequent ten minute rule bills introduced by Cecil and Foot.⁴³ It is true that neither of the Smith bills got as far as a second reading, presumably because he was too far down the ballot. But perhaps they have also been forgotten because women's organisations were not lobbying the Labour party very actively at this time, whereas Ray Strachey was 'in the thick of a group of discontented Conservatives... really indistinguishable from Liberals.'⁴⁴ Given the reasonable progress made with Adamson's bill in 1919 and Grundy's in 1920, the women's organisations might have made more progress if they had focussed more on Labour. However, in this period of Coalition government they may have anticipated less chance of success with the opposition party: Labour, with only 57 MPs elected in 1918, had never been in government. NUSEC reckoned 'Nothing short of a government measure stands any chance of success.'⁴⁵ The Six Point Group had criticised the strategy of concentrating on private members' bills as playing into the government's hands.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Walter Smith was a Labour MP from a trade union background. Smith was supported in both years by fellow Labour MPs J R Clynes, T W Grundy, William Adamson, Benjamin Spoor, Arthur Henderson and Thomas Shaw, plus Tyson Wilson in 1921 and Colonel Wedgwood in 1922.

⁴² Labour's 1918 election manifesto included, 'The Labour Party stands for complete adult suffrage.' F W S Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966* (Chichester, Sussex: Political Reference Publications, 1970).

⁴³ They are not mentioned at all in Law, *Suffrage and power*.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Ibid, p192. Martin Francis comments on accounts of mutual incomprehension and sometimes antagonism between socialist and feminists, and that NUSEC were always closer to the Liberals than Labour. Martin Francis, 'Labour and gender' in *Labour's First Century* (eds Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ PA, ST/50.

⁴⁶ Law, *Suffrage and power*, p193.

An equal franchise bill was presented by Lord Robert Cecil as a motion under the Ten Minute Rule in 1922.⁴⁷ The Ten Minute Rule allowed a speech in favour of legislation and a speech against. Although it would have been unlikely to lead to legislation, Cecil used the opportunity to give equal franchise an airing in the House which it would not otherwise have enjoyed. 'Now who will oppose?' Cecil asked. An Hon Member shouted: 'Banbury!'⁴⁸ Banbury was present and doubtless would have been only too willing, but it was Lieutenant-Colonel Archer-Shee who stood up, saying the arguments had been thrashed out in committee in the last such bill (i.e. Grundy's bill), 'which died a natural death.' Astor cried, 'No, no, a most unnatural death!'⁴⁹ Cecil's motion passed by 208 votes to 60. NUSEC concluded, hopefully; 'in spite of the fact that the vote was not taken very seriously, [it is] an indication of the manner in which the opinion of the House is growing more and more in favour.'⁵⁰ The bill was drafted by NUSEC and duly brought in by Cecil with cross-party supporters,⁵¹ but went no further. Cecil had made his point, which was all that could be expected under the Ten Minute Rule.

History repeated itself in 1923, when another equal franchise bill identical to Cecil's was brought in under the Ten Minute Rule, this time by the Liberal MP Isaac Foot.⁵² Foot first checked whether the government intended to bring in its own bill, in a question on 13 March; the Prime Minister (Bonar Law) confirmed that they were not. Foot brought forward his motion on 25 April, speaking of the 'resentment and indignation I used to feel when I was one of a family of six exercising the vote and my mother could not exercise it although she had more sense than the rest of us put together.'⁵³ Again Lieutenant-Colonel Archer-Shee opposed, claiming, 'There is a great danger of giving the electoral power of this country into the hands of

⁴⁷ Cecil's previous support for women's issues has been covered in chapters 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ HC Deb 8 Mar 1922 vol 151 c1288, Lord Robert Cecil.

⁴⁹ Ibid, c1289, Lieutenant-Colonel Archer-Shee, Viscountess Astor.

⁵⁰ WL, 2NSE/C/5. NUSEC annual report 1922.

⁵¹ Cecil was supported by Conservatives Major Hills and Nancy Astor, Liberals Donald Maclean, Mrs Wintringham and Aneurin Williams, and Labour's Arthur Henderson.

⁵² Isaac Foot was Liberal MP for Bodmin, Cornwall, 1922-1924 and 1929-1935. He had previously lost a by-election in Plymouth Sutton in 1919 to Nancy Astor.

⁵³ HC Deb 25 Apr 1923 vol 163 c472. Isaac Foot. Foot himself had seven children including a number of future politicians. Stanley Goodman, 'Foot, Isaac (1880-1960)', rev Mark Pottle, *ODNB*.

the women.⁵⁴ There was no division, and Foot brought in his bill.⁵⁵ Like Cecil's it got no further.

1924: The Adamson bill – closest to success

At the general election in late 1923 the Labour Party again included support for equal franchise in their manifesto.⁵⁶ The Labour minority government came to power in 1924, but equal franchise was not high on its list of priorities and there was no government bill. Instead an equal franchise bill was introduced by William Murdoch Adamson as a private members' bill.⁵⁷ With a Labour MP at its helm, a Labour government in power, and support for equal franchise declared by many Conservatives at the general election,⁵⁸ Adamson's bill was subsequently adopted by the government and came the closest to achieving equal franchise since 1919. For the first time there were women Labour MPs, two of whom (Susan Lawrence and Dorothy Jewson) acted as supporters of Adamson's bill along with the long-standing supporter of women's suffrage, George Lansbury. Another equal franchise bill was introduced this session by Hugh Edwards, supported by Lady Terrington and Mrs Wintringham, but was not even printed; all effort this session went towards Adamson's bill.

Adamson began his speech at second reading on 29 February. 'The Press has named this Bill a Leap Year proposal, owing I suppose to the fact that it is being introduced on this, the 29th day of February. I rather think, however, that if it had been a Leap Year proposal, probably one of the lady Members of the House would have been in the fortunate position of putting it

⁵⁴ HC Deb 25 Apr 1923 vol 163 c474-5. Archer-Shee.

⁵⁵ Foot was supported by an assortment of party allegiances: Conservatives Nancy Astor and Robert Newman; Liberals Alfred James Bonwick, Major Entwistle, Graham White and Mrs Wintringham; Independent Liberal James Butler; Labour MPs William Graham and Philip Snowden; and Oswald Mosley who was independent in this period. There was also a Mr Thorne, who might be either the Liberal George Thorne or Labour's Will Thorne.

⁵⁶ 'Labour stands for equality between men and women: equal political and legal rights, equal rights and privileges in parenthood, equal pay for equal work.' Craig, *Manifestos*.

⁵⁷ Confusingly this is not the William Adamson (1863-1936), Labour MP for West Fife and by now Secretary for Scotland, who had introduced the Women's Emancipation bill in 1919. William Murdoch Adamson (1881-1945) was Labour MP for Cannock. Butler, *The electoral system*. William Murdoch Adamson's wife Jennie became an MP in 1938.

⁵⁸ Sanders recorded 'The matter is difficult because so many of our people have pledged themselves to the principle.' Bayford, *Real old Tory politics*. Entry for 24 Jun 1924, p215.

forward.⁵⁹ Jewson used her maiden speech to second the bill; Wintringham and Astor also spoke in favour. Many male MPs supported the bill and made strong arguments. Valentine McEntee pointed out that women under 30 could become MPs, and declared shamelessly, 'I would not dare guess the age of the ladies who are already Members of the House, but I think it is quite probable that all of them are well under 30.'⁶⁰

However, opposition to Adamson's bill also came from a woman MP. The Duchess of Atholl moved a delaying amendment, asking for a conference to be held on the issue. Her fellow Conservative, Nancy Astor, said of Atholl, 'she is like Canute, trying to keep the waves back.'⁶¹ Atholl's action is well known to historians, but is often presented too simply as a vote against equal franchise.⁶² Undoubtedly Atholl was anti-feminist in this period, with little sympathy for women's organisations. However examination of her speech shows a more nuanced position on equal franchise.⁶³ She queried whether women really wanted it and was sceptical about women's contribution to public life. But she was also at pains to point out that she recognised some legitimate grievances (women over 30 without the vote, university women voters under 30, and new widows over the age of 30 removed from the registers when their husbands died), and that her amendment asked for a conference.⁶⁴

The government's position was expressed by the Under Secretary for the Home Department, John Rhys Davies, who explained that the government were in favour of this bill, but could not guarantee time for it. A number of MPs were unimpressed, saying that it left them 'in very

⁵⁹ HC Deb 29 Feb 1924 vol 170 c859, William M Adamson.

⁶⁰ Ibid, c912, Stephen Dodds (Liberal); c904. Valentine McEntee (Labour). None of the women MPs was younger than 30!

⁶¹ Ibid, c938, Astor.

⁶² For example Pugh, *Women and the women's movement*, p54: 'Mrs Hilton Phillipson... and the Duchess of Atholl... voted against bills to grant women equal franchise'. Linda McDougall, *Westminster women* (London: Vintage, 1998), p186: 'In the early years of her parliamentary career she consistently voted against "women's issue" proposals such as the 1924 attempt to lower the age at which women could vote to twenty-one.' Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House*, (London: Athlone Press, 1979), p121: 'What became clear in this debate was that not only men but some women too were still opposed to the measure.'

⁶³ Atholl's biographer, who does not cover the equal franchise issue, says, 'Kitty would never become a feminist, but she was meeting, mixing and discussing problems on a friendly basis with women who were.' S J Hetherington, *Katharine Atholl, 1874-1960: against the tide* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), p134.

⁶⁴ HC Deb 29 Feb 1924 vol 170 c873 & c868, Duchess of Atholl.

considerable bewilderment and uncertainty.⁶⁵ The Lord Privy Seal, J R Clynes, stated that if he were to declare that the government would take over this Bill, 'it would probably be killed this afternoon,' as this was a private members' Bill on a private members' Friday.⁶⁶ So despite 'Ministerial cheers' at several points during Adamson's introduction of the bill,⁶⁷ they were not at this point prepared to make it a government measure.⁶⁸ Atholl's amendment was defeated on a division, 288 votes to 72. This was the first occasion that women MPs acted as tellers at the vote (Atholl against the bill and Jewson for). A suggestion to take the bill to a committee of the whole House (which would have caused delay) was similarly defeated, 247 votes to 77. Adamson's bill therefore moved on to be considered by Standing Committee A between 22 May and 19 June.

The standing committee debates show much tetchy discussion and interesting arguments on a wide variety of issues. Initially the committee was concerned that they would waste time discussing a private members' bill which would not pass (echoes of the standing committee which had considered Grundy's bill in 1920). There was discussion as to whether Adamson could drop the parts of the bill which dealt with matters other than equal franchise, and if so, whether the government would support it (the Home Secretary, Arthur Henderson, indicated they would).⁶⁹ A variety of amendments were considered. The first was to safeguard the rights of those who already had the vote (unanimously agreed).

The second amendment, by Lord Eustace Percy, was to postpone equal franchise until 1928. This was ostensibly to safeguard the supposed agreement of 1918 and to avoid the prospect of the government having to dissolve early. There was lots of splendidly reactionary support for this. As NUSEC recorded 'progress [of the bill] was greatly retarded by obstruction on behalf of the Conservative members,' who did not oppose directly, but by much 'oblique attack.'⁷⁰ James Marley was scornful, arguing that they should not 'postpone the operation of this Act

⁶⁵ Ibid, c884-5. Under Secretary for the Home Department (Rhys Davies); c887, Leo Amery (Conservative).

⁶⁶ Ibid, c926-928, Lord Privy Seal (J R Clynes).

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 1 Mar 1924.

⁶⁸ Also later expressed by the Prime Minister in answer to a Parliamentary question by Mrs Wintringham. HC Deb 9 Apr 1924 vol 172 c423.

⁶⁹ SC Deb (A) 22 May 1924, c498, Arthur Henderson.

⁷⁰ WL, 2NSE/C/7. NUSEC annual report 1924.

for 40 years in order that the Tories may get their party machine organised.' Susan Lawrence accused Percy of obstruction to kill the bill; Hugh Cecil claimed Lawrence had 'the aptitude to fulfil a function other than that of a Member of Parliament, and that is the function of a finishing governess.' The put-downs came thick and fast: Ben Turner told the committee that he had daughters over the age of 30 who could not vote because they were unmarried and not property owners, and declared to Cecil: 'You insult my daughters.' Cecil responded, 'Not at all... But they would be more useful to their country when they have had a little more experience.' Turner: 'They are useful now. They can teach.'⁷¹ Percy's amendment was withdrawn.

At the next sitting of the Committee on 3 June, the 21 versus 25 age question was debated. Henderson stated clearly that the government were in favour of age 21. Percy's amendment was for age 25, and was lost by 11 votes to 38.⁷² On 5 June an amendment was agreed to enable equal franchise on the business premises vote, i.e. giving the husband a vote if his wife was the qualifying business person. This change was adopted in the Equal Franchise Act which eventually passed in 1928.⁷³

The committee was then submerged in the minutiae of various clauses. An amendment on the university franchise which would have allowed some voters a possible *triple* qualification (university, business and personal), was lost on division but narrowly, 16 to 17.⁷⁴ An additional clause on redistribution of Parliamentary seats caused great debate, and eventually fell 18 to 23.⁷⁵ Finally, Samuel Roberts proposed a new clause that votes cast by voters over age 35 should count as two votes, and their ballot papers would be a different colour so they could be distinguished. Thomas Dickson called the clause 'crystallised stupidity.' Lawrence declared

⁷¹ SC Deb (A) 22 May 1924, c537. James Marley (Labour); c547. Hugh Cecil; c539 & 549, Ben Turner (Labour). Turner had been one of the founding members of the ILP in 1893.

⁷² SC Deb (A) 3 Jun 1924 c592. The attendance at this standing committee sitting was very good, with 49 present out of a possible 65.

⁷³ An estimated 16,000 men in England and Wales gained a new vote in respect of their wives' occupation of business premises. *Return showing in respect of each Parliamentary Constituency in England, Wales and Scotland, the estimated increase in the electorate under the provisions of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Bill, 1928*. Cmd 3119, 1928. Melinda Haunton argues the extension of the business qualification vote was 'a deeply conservative move, propping up the last remnant of the property qualification', and that the significance of the Act for gender equality has obscured this aspect. Haunton, 'Conservatism and society', pp178-9.

⁷⁴ SC Deb (A) 5 Jun 1924 c616, Susan Lawrence.

⁷⁵ SC Deb (A) 19 Jun 1924 c636 & 656, Henderson.

that some members were previously inclined to laugh about this clause, but now 'I feel the awful pathos of it...' and, if taken to its logical conclusion, 'agents of all the parties would be found crowding around the precious centenarian to bring him tottering out with his perhaps 20 or 30 votes on his shoulders.'⁷⁶ The amendment was wisely withdrawn.

Historians have seen the committee stage of this bill as simply a product of Conservative delaying tactics.⁷⁷ Undoubtedly this is true, but there is a marked contrast with the standing committee in 1920 which had been used to torpedo Grundy's bill. The full debates in 1924 leave a strong impression of many MPs muddling their way through a very complex bill, uncertain of its effects, and stating that various wordings would need to be examined by the government's law officers before Report stage. Yet they treated it very seriously indeed, and tried to do what was necessary to get it through. Thomas Inskip referred to it as 'a Bill of first-class importance, without the assistance and advice which we should like on both sides.'⁷⁸ On 16 July the bill finally obtained this assistance; the Prime Minister declared that the government would adopt and proceed with the bill this session.⁷⁹ The cabinet duly noted the bill as one of the more 'important and urgent' bills to which the government was committed.⁸⁰

It has been argued that 'it would have been a relatively simple matter in June for the Government to have adopted the bill and put it through its remaining stages.'⁸¹ However Parliament was in recess for the best part of two months between 7 August and 30 September, and the Labour government fell almost directly after Parliament returned, on 8 October, before the bill reached report stage. Also even if it had finished its passage through the Commons, the minority Labour government would have had an enormous task in getting it

⁷⁶ Ibid, cc666-667, Samuel Roberts (Conservative); c670, Thomas Dickson (Labour); c669, Susan Lawrence; c.671, Lord Eustace Percy.

⁷⁷ Law, *Suffrage and power*, p197.

⁷⁸ SC Deb (A) 5 Jun 1924 c597, Thomas Inskip.

⁷⁹ HC Deb 16 Jul 1924 vol 176 c368, Prime Minister (Ramsay MacDonald) in answer to a question from Mrs Wintringham.

⁸⁰ TNA, CAB/23/48. Meeting 30 Jul 1924.

⁸¹ Law, *Suffrage and power*, pp197-198.

through the House of Lords. The Conservatives were prepared to use the Lords to block the bill if necessary.⁸²

Baldwin's pledge & Joynson-Hicks's commitment

The general election was held on 29 October 1924, the Conservative party won by a large majority, and all the existing female Labour MPs lost their seats. Although the Conservatives had not included equal franchise in their manifesto, Baldwin made a pledge which was taken by some as proof that the Conservatives had made a commitment to equal franchise during the general election campaign of 1924. Baldwin's pledge was much quoted thereafter:

The Unionist Party are in favour of equal political rights for men and women and desire that the question of the extension of the franchise should if possible be settled by agreement. With this in view they would if returned to power propose that the matter be referred to a Conference of all political Parties on the lines of the Ullswater Committee.⁸³

This built on a statement two years previously by the late Bonar Law that the gender discrimination in the 1918 Act 'could not be permanent'.⁸⁴

However Baldwin's pledge was made in a letter subsequently published in the press,⁸⁵ it had not appeared in Baldwin's election address, nor had it been made in the House of Commons. Therefore opponents could deny that it was binding. For example in 1928 Charles Oman was outraged enough to say that 'a letter written by our leader to a private person in October 1924 made it constitute part of the Conservative programme... I plead that such printed matters put

⁸² 'I am now assured that even if it passes the Commons the Lords will not let it go through.' Bayford, *Real old Tory politics*. Entry for 24 Jun 1924, p215.

⁸³ *The Times*, 18 Oct 1924. The Ullswater Committee was the Speaker's Conference which had preceded the Representation of the People Act 1918.

⁸⁴ Bonar Law said: 'I have been a consistent supporter of women's suffrage and even at the time that the Franchise Bill of 1918 was passed I felt that the discrimination in age between men and women could not be permanent. I think so still.' Quoted as a 'pronouncement' during the 1922 election. Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Baldwin Papers 56.

⁸⁵ In *The Times* on 18 Oct 1924 the pledge was quoted as 'a statement'. It was published in the *Morning Post* on 27 Oct 1924 as part of a letter from Baldwin to Dame Caroline Bridgeman, Chair of the Women's Unionist Organisation (and wife of Viscount Bridgeman, subsequently First Lord of the Admiralty in Baldwin's government), 'An Appeal to Women'. The letter was mainly about Baldwin's concern about the cost of living for housewives, coming to equal franchise only at the end. Although addressed to Dame Caroline, it is clear that Baldwin wrote the letter for public consumption.

in the "Morning Post" does not constitute a pledge from the Conservative party.' Frederick Hall declared, 'We never brought forward this policy in 1924.'⁸⁶ Yet the pledge was widely publicised and Baldwin never repudiated it. When the government's equal franchise bill was finally introduced in 1928, Nancy Astor declared, 'I want to congratulate the Prime Minister on keeping his pledges.'⁸⁷ Of Baldwin's biographers, Stuart Ball writes that Baldwin enacted equal franchise, 'In keeping with the spirit of confidence in the good sense of democracy', and there is no doubt that, as Middlemas and Barnes remark, 'Whatever may be said of the Conservatives' late conversion to her cause [that of Emmeline Pankhurst, whose statue Baldwin unveiled], Baldwin's own conviction is unquestioned.'⁸⁸

Given the pledge, there was some disappointment in the autumn of 1924 that no equal franchise bill was forthcoming. In the debate on the address on 10 December, Ellen Wilkinson spoke: 'As the only woman Member in Opposition I have a duty to raise certain matters... Women as a whole are very disappointed that there is no mention in the King's speech of any alteration of the present franchise.'⁸⁹ On 17 December Ernest Thurtle asked about equal franchise legislation; Baldwin responded that it was 'not possible to make a statement at present.'⁹⁰ Having ascertained that a government bill was unlikely, a private member's bill was swiftly forthcoming. An equal franchise bill was duly presented by Labour MP William Whiteley, who had second place in the ballot, on 13 February.⁹¹

At the second reading of Whiteley's bill on 20 February, the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, put down an amendment to postpone the bill until later in the Parliament. This was designed to kill the bill, and an interesting action from the point of view of Parliamentary procedure. Henderson said it was the first time in 22 years he had known a government put

⁸⁶ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1432, Sir Charles Oman (Conservative); c1445, Sir Frederick Hall (Conservative).

⁸⁷ Ibid, c1449-50, Viscountess Astor.

⁸⁸ Stuart Ball, 'Baldwin, Stanley, first Earl Baldwin of Bewdley (1867–1947)', *ODNB*. Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p468.

⁸⁹ HC Deb 10 Dec 1924 vol 179 cc242-244, Wilkinson.

⁹⁰ HC Deb 17 Dec 1924 vol 179 c981, Ernest Thurtle (Labour) and Prime Minister (Stanley Baldwin). The same question was repeated on 18 Dec 1924 c1199, by Wedgwood Benn.

⁹¹ William Whiteley, miner and trade unionist, entered the Commons in 1922. Whiteley was supported by a slate of solidly Labour MPs: Arthur Henderson, Ellen Wilkinson, Fred Pethick-Lawrence, George Lansbury, William Adamson, Sir Henry Slessor, Hastings Lees-Smith and Philip Snowden.

down an amendment to a private members' bill. Ramsay MacDonald echoed this, saying it was 'not fair on a Friday.' Astor complained that it should be a free vote. Baldwin responded, 'when private Members try to introduce Government Bills, it becomes the Government's business.'⁹²

Whiteley argued that as the principle of equal franchise was accepted, there was no need to delay, and it was not necessary to hold a General Election quickly afterwards. Ellen Wilkinson, seconding the bill, referred to Baldwin's pledge and to the fallacy of arguments that young women would vote for the best looking candidates: 'On looking around this House, Mr Speaker, I cannot see that there is any need for the hon. Members to be worried.'⁹³ 'She caused the House to laugh loudly.'⁹⁴ There were still some MPs prepared to oppose the principle of equal franchise, like Charles Oman: 'You cannot say "This is a human being; therefore it must have a vote."' When Astor pointed out that women were now in the cabinet, John Jones responded, 'Women should make cabinet puddings.'⁹⁵ Gerald Strickland commented that if the franchise was extended then judging by Australia there would be no women MPs as 'the number of the fair sex returned to the House will arrive at the zero stage.'⁹⁶

But the most important exchange during the debate was between Joynton-Hicks and Astor. Joynton-Hicks argued that the government had only been in power for three months and now was not the time. He quoted Baldwin's pledge, declaring, 'I am not afraid of young women voters,' and predicted that the government would last until 1929, so there was plenty of time.⁹⁷ A conference could be set up in 1926 and a bill introduced in the following year. Joynton-Hicks then said there would be 'Equal votes for men and women', which led to the following exchange:

⁹² HC Deb 20 Feb 1925 vol 180 c1495, Henderson; c1557, MacDonald; c1543, Astor; c1560 Prime Minister (Baldwin).

⁹³ Ibid, c1481, Whiteley; c1485, Wilkinson.

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 21 Feb 1925.

⁹⁵ Ibid, c1511, Oman; c1526, John Jones (Labour).

⁹⁶ Ibid, c1546, Gerald Strickland (Conservative). Strickland had previously served as governor of Tasmania, Western Australia and New South Wales between 1904 and 1917.

⁹⁷ Ibid, c1503 and c1515. Joynton-Hicks. NUSEC feared that 'Delay was dangerous as no political prophet would venture to give even the safest of Governments the three years office necessitated.' WL, 2NSE/C/8, NUSEC annual report 1925. However, Joynton-Hicks' prediction was accurate.

Viscountess Astor: '...Does the right hon. Gentleman mean equal votes at 21?'

Sir W Joynson-Hicks: 'It means exactly what it says.' [Hon Members: 'Answer!'] '...I will say quite definitely that means that no difference will take place in the ages at which men and women will go to the poll at the next election.'⁹⁸

Baldwin was present at this debate, and did not contradict his Home Secretary. The equal franchise therefore came to be seen as government policy, and the fact that Joynson-Hicks's undertaking was made in the House of Commons gave it crucial credibility.⁹⁹ However the fact that it had been expressed in an exchange during a debate on a private member's bill, rather than through any more deliberate statement, opened it up to subsequent doubt and some derision in the same way as Baldwin's pledge. In 1928, Lord Newton referred to how 'the Home Secretary... blurted out that he thought young women ought to have votes in the same way as young men... somehow the Party has unconsciously drifted into this position.'¹⁰⁰ L J Maxse wrote in the flapper-hostile *Daily Mail* that, 'a casual Minister took it upon himself one Friday afternoon (to the no small surprise of the few colleagues who heard him) to advocate this leap in the dark.'¹⁰¹ The diary of Cuthbert Headlam complained, 'Jix apparently made it one Friday afternoon and the PM unfortunately was sitting beside him and never said a word – really our leaders are somewhat casual in their methods.'¹⁰²

Was 'Jix' expressing the view of the cabinet? The cabinet's view had been agreed two days previously: 'to state that the Government intended to give effect to [Baldwin's pledge] later in the life of the present Parliament by proposing a Conference of all political parties.'¹⁰³ Jix's undertaking in the Commons arguably went beyond this at the point where he added to Astor, 'no difference will take place in the ages at which men and women will go to the poll at the

⁹⁸ Ibid, cc1500-1503.

⁹⁹ A suggestion was made at one point in 1927 that the 'House of Commons be invited to relieve the government from the 1925 undertaking,' but this would be seen as 'the breach of a Parliamentary bargain.' TNA, CAB 27/336. Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee, 21 Feb 1927.

¹⁰⁰ HL Deb 21 May 1928 vol 71 c190, Lord Newton (Conservative).

¹⁰¹ Women's Library, 7AMP/D/5/1. *Daily Mail*, 14 Nov 1927. Maxse's words are very misleading: the 'casual Minister' being the Home Secretary, and the 'few colleagues' including the Prime Minister and numbering at least 373 (the number who voted in the subsequent division).

¹⁰² Cuthbert Headlam, *Parliament and politics in the age of Baldwin and MacDonald: the Headlam diaries 1923-1935*, ed Stuart Ball (London: Historian's Press, 1992). Entry for 1 May 1927, p118.

¹⁰³ TNA CAB/23/49. Cabinet meeting 9 (25), 18 Feb 1925, item 11.

next election.' Certainly a number of his cabinet colleagues thought he had gone too far. William Bridgeman remembered, 'On the subject of women's suffrage he [Joynson-Hicks] gave an answer in the House which seemed to me quite incompatible with the decision of that morning's Cabinet'.¹⁰⁴ Churchill wrote in a cabinet memo, 'The Home Secretary... put an interpretation on the Prime Minister's pre-election declaration which went far beyond what the party was committed to or the Cabinet had sanctioned, and also beyond anything which had ever been discussed in a grave or practical manner by any body of responsible Ministers.'¹⁰⁵

In 1965 A J P Taylor wrote, 'The usually obscurantist Joynson-Hicks promised the flapper vote in the excitement of a public meeting, and the government felt they must honour his promise.'¹⁰⁶ Historians have subsequently argued that this image of accident-prone 'Jix' caught off-guard is false, and that certain quarters of the Conservative party constructed this idea to explain the anomaly of Joynson-Hicks, usually an unremitting 'Diehard', becoming an unlikely champion of equal franchise.¹⁰⁷ However Jix's own defence, in an unpublished autobiographical fragment, has the ring of hindsight to it and he does not quite dare claim the cabinet was behind him:

Every action I took was taken with the assent of the PM and our colleagues, none of whom carried their objections to the point of resigning or threatening resignation, and

¹⁰⁴ William Bridgeman, *The modernisation of Conservative politics: the diaries and letters of William Bridgeman 1904-1935*, ed Philip Williamson (London: Historian's Press, 1988). Entry for Nov 1929, p233. Butler says 'one member of the 1925 Cabinet recalls that the Home Secretary went to the 1925 debate without Cabinet instructions on equal franchise because, owing to lunch, that part of the Cabinet was never reached,' but does not give a source. Butler, *The electoral system in Britain*, p30.

¹⁰⁵ Winston Churchill, *Winston S Churchill, vol 5, Companion Pt 1, Documents - the Exchequer years 1922-1929*, eds Martin Gilbert and Randolph S Churchill (London: Heinemann, 1979). Memo by Churchill, p963.

¹⁰⁶ A J P Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1965), p262, footnote. Taylor also remarks that the Equal Franchise Act was 'promoted by the government for no particular reason.'

¹⁰⁷ Jonathon Hopkins, 'Paradoxes personified: Sir William Joynson-Hicks, Viscount Brentford and the conflict between change and stability in British society in the 1920s', (University of Westminster, MPhil, 1996). Hopkins' argument is developed by Huw Clayton, 'The Life and Career of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, 1865-1932: A Reassessment', pp1-38 in *Journal of Historical Biography* 8, 2010, pp6, 22-24. Clayton finds some evidence as to Jix's possible sympathy with women's rights, even suggesting that his addition of 'Hicks', his wife's name, to his on marriage in 1895 might be an early expression of this.

who therefore, according to all rules of Cabinet solidarity, were for ever debarred from criticizing the decision which was taken and acted upon.¹⁰⁸

Baldwin and Joynson-Hicks both clearly personally supported equal franchise, and the fact that both the Prime Minister and Home Secretary apparently had to use such roundabout methods to manoeuvre their party into supporting their view shows the extent of private cabinet disagreement. It is also of interest that it was an intervention by Astor that caused Jix to clarify the extent of his commitment.¹⁰⁹ The government had their way on Whiteley's bill; the division was lost 153 to 220. The only surprise was perhaps that the government vote was not larger given their 419 MPs; as it was, ten Conservatives went into the lobby against it.¹¹⁰

1925-1927: the age of questions and the cabinet decision

Joynson-Hicks' pledge for a Speaker's Conference encouraged MPs to bombard the Prime Minister with questions about it throughout 1925,¹¹¹ to which the Home Office had to put much effort into replying.¹¹² The trend carried relentlessly on into 1926. Questions were asked on seven occasions between February and July 1926,¹¹³ and on a further six occasions during November and December,¹¹⁴ which Baldwin continued to stall. Meanwhile, 'some of the pre-war atmosphere of the suffrage movement was recreated in the years from 1926 to 1928,'¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Jix Collection J1/B-3c, quoted in Hopkins, *Paradoxes*, p102.

¹⁰⁹ Jix clashed with Lady Astor soon after her election, when he found out she was using his corner seat in the House of Commons. Jix Collection J3/B-8d, quoted in Hopkins, *Paradoxes*, p103.

¹¹⁰ The ten rebel Conservatives included Astor, Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentick, Edmund Radford, Colonel H W Burton, Sir Robert Newman, Alfred R Kennedy, A C N Dixey and Lieutenant-Colonel V L Henderson. *The Times*, 21 Feb 1925.

¹¹¹ Charles Ammon (Labour), 2 Mar 1925; Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy, 3 Mar; Rhys Morris (Ind Liberal), Kenworthy and Wedgwood Benn on 28 Apr; Benn again on 25 May; Major Horace Crawford for Alexander Livingstone (both Liberal) and W Thorne on 10 June; Crawford again on 18 Nov.

¹¹² TNA, HO 45/13020.

¹¹³ On 8 Feb by Frank Briant (Liberal); 10 Feb by Ellen Wilkinson; 23 Mar by Ernest Thurtle; 24 Mar by Robert Taylor (Labour); 19 Apr by Thomas Fenby for Archibald Sinclair (both Liberal); 14 Jun by R Newman; 5 July by Taylor.

¹¹⁴ On 11 Nov by Wilkinson and Wedgwood Benn; 16 Nov by R Richardson for Whiteley; 24 Nov by John Hayes (Labour); 29 Nov by Newman; 1 Dec by G Thorne; 13 Dec by Hore-Belisha (Liberal).

¹¹⁵ Johanna Alberti, 'A symbol and a key: the suffrage movement in Britain, 1918-1928' in S S Holton and J Purvis, *Votes for women* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p282.

with women's groups organising demonstrations, mass meetings, deputations and publications.¹¹⁶ The Lord Chancellor's Office was lobbied as well as the Home Office.¹¹⁷ However NUSEC recorded sadly in 1926 that 'Lack of Parliamentary progress with regard to Equal Franchise has been a very depressing factor.'¹¹⁸ Baldwin was happy to re-state his private support for equal franchise but not to commit any time for its introduction.¹¹⁹ He explained 'A great deal has happened in 1926 which was not foreseen,' (presumably referring to the General Strike, among other events).¹²⁰ Wedgwood Benn introduced an equal franchise private members' bill in 1926,¹²¹ as did Haden Guest in 1927.¹²² Neither got a second reading. Private members' bills were not going to get anywhere while the government was deliberating its position.

The cabinet could not agree a solution, as Bridgeman wrote in 1927; 'Baldwin... has been much worried over the franchise question and the House of Lords on neither of which subject is there unanimity within Cabinet.'¹²³ In late 1926 the Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee was formed to investigate the issues. The Cabinet Committee held three meetings and gathered

¹¹⁶ For example NUSEC's Sub-Committee on Equal Franchise organised large demonstrations on 3 Jul 1926 at Hyde Park and 3 Mar 1927 at Central Hall Westminster. WL, 2NSE/A/7/1.

¹¹⁷ TNA, LCO 2/817.

¹¹⁸ WL, 2NSE/C/9. NUSEC annual report 1926.

¹¹⁹ He wrote to NUSEC on 17 Feb 1926, 'I see no reason to think that women of the same age as men are less capable of exercising the franchise.' CUL, Baldwin Papers 52.

¹²⁰ HC Deb 13 Dec 1926 vol 200 cc2558-9. Stuart Ball writes, 'Industrial peace was Baldwin's key theme from 1923 to 1927'. He was also tired and ill during 1926-1927. Stuart Ball, 'Baldwin', *ONDB*.

¹²¹ Benn was mostly supported by Liberals (Frank Briant, H E Crawford, J M Kenworthy, A M Livingstone, Walter Runciman, T D Fenby, W Trevelyan Thomson) plus two Labour (Ellen Wilkinson and F W Pethick-Lawrence). Benn was to switch to Labour himself the following year.

¹²² Leslie Haden-Guest was supported by Labour MPs Arthur Henderson, William Whiteley, Susan Lawrence (who had been re-elected in 1926), Fred Pethick-Lawrence, H B Lees-Smith, Philip Snowden, William Lunn, George Lansbury, James Barr, Frederick Roberts and Margaret Bondfield. Haden-Guest left the Labour Party very soon afterwards over their policy on China; he subsequently stood as an Independent and a Conservative candidate before rejoining Labour in 1931. Stenton and Lees, *Who's Who*.

¹²³ Bridgeman, *The modernisation of Conservative politics*. Entry for Apr 1927, p204.

documents. Its minutes show that Baldwin's pledge of 1924 and Joynson-Hicks' undertaking of 1925 were very much the impetus behind the need for action.¹²⁴

The perceived impact of equal franchise on the Conservative party

When equal franchise finally arrived, Joynson-Hicks denied that the government was acting from any motives of political expediency, stating, 'It does not in the least matter which way they vote. We are doing what we believe to be right.' However several MPs pointed out that it was ironic that all the opposition came from the government's own benches.¹²⁵

The Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee papers show they considered the effect of equal franchise on the Conservative Party very carefully indeed, and there was much fear of universal suffrage. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury believed that party opinion was 'fluid'; Conservative Party Chairman J C C Davidson thought that equal franchise at 21 would 'prejudice the party in industrial areas.' The view from Conservative Central Office was that '21 would have a detrimental effect on the futures of the Party.'¹²⁶ It was desperate enough to suggest to the Home Office in May 1927 an alternative scheme whereby people over 30 could have 2 votes (possibly inspired by the similar suggestion made during Parliamentary debates in 1924),¹²⁷ but the Home Office was unsurprisingly sure that objections would outweigh any advantages of such a scheme.¹²⁸ Many Conservatives were very worried indeed about the effect on their party. Robert Sanders' diary records 'FE [F E Smith, Lord Birkenhead] was in a great state of mind about the flapper vote..... He thinks it means ruin to the party.'¹²⁹ Churchill warned the cabinet, 'we may easily march to a decisive and long-lasting defeat.'¹³⁰ Cuthbert Headlam's diary records, 'There is no doubt that we are taking a big leap in

¹²⁴ TNA, CAB 27/336. The Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee met on 15 Dec 1926, and 14 and 21 Feb 1927.

¹²⁵ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1370, Joynson-Hicks; c1431, Oman; c1465, Henderson.

¹²⁶ TNA, CAB 27/336. Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee, 21 Feb 1927. Davidson also expressed his fear of equal franchise repeatedly in private correspondence, for example in a letter to Baldwin, 6 Apr 1927. CUL, Baldwin Papers, 52.

¹²⁷ See above section on the Adamson bill.

¹²⁸ TNA, HO 45/13020.

¹²⁹ Bayford, *Real old Tory politics*. Entry for 27 Apr 1927, p232.

¹³⁰ Churchill, *Winston S Churchill*. Cabinet memorandum, 8 Mar 1927, p959.

the dark. My own view is that in the industrial districts Labour will score heavily... In our pit villages the women are far wilder than the men – and they are hopeless to argue with.¹³¹

However there were contrary views from the Conservative Party's own Women's Advisory Committee. Gwendolen Eveden wrote to the Home Office on 19 November 1926 that they had passed a resolution that, unless there was action on equal franchise, 'Great discontent will ensue among the women of the country with results prejudicial to the interests of the Party at the next General Election.' A Home Office note remarks dryly that 'the view expressed is rather different from that expressed at the last meeting [of the Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee] by J C Davidson.'¹³² The Women's Advisory Committee's position was supported in Parliament by Robert Sanders as Chairman of the National Union of Conservative Associations.¹³³ Among the resolutions passed by the National Union of Conservative & Unionist Associations conference in October 1927 was 'that in the opinion of this Conference the time has come to fulfil Ministerial pledges... there should be Equal Franchise before the next election.'¹³⁴ Thomas Jones's diary said, 'Several of the most experienced Conservative agents not afraid at all of effects on party,'¹³⁵ and a set of returns from Conservative agents show their main concern was the possibility of removing the franchise from men under the age of 25.¹³⁶ Even J C C Davidson eventually decided that equal franchise would not necessarily be detrimental to the party. His correspondence and memoirs express his anxiety to use more women in party organisation, and 'The fact that the Conservative party had led the van in the electoral field as regards women gave us a very definite lead.'¹³⁷ Although the flapper vote was blamed by some for the Conservative party's defeat in 1929, there is no evidence that the new women electors

¹³¹ Headlam, *Parliament and politics*. Entry for 1 May 1927, p118. Headlam was MP for Barnard Castle, and did lose his seat in 1929.

¹³² TNA, HO 45/13020.

¹³³ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1412, Sanders.

¹³⁴ CUL, Baldwin Papers 48.

¹³⁵ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall diary, Vol 2, 1926-1930*, ed Keith Middlemas (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Entry for 12 Apr 1928.

¹³⁶ CUL, Baldwin Papers 52.

¹³⁷ John Colin Campbell Davidson, *Memoirs of a Conservative: J C C Davidson's memoirs and papers, 1910-37*, ed Robert Rhodes James (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p266.

were disadvantageous to any party in the inter-war period; since the Second World War women voters have mostly divided among parties the same way as men.¹³⁸

The (lack of a) Speaker's conference

Baldwin's pledge had been for a conference along the lines of the Speaker's Conference during the First World War, which never took place. MPs both for and against equal franchise expressed regret.¹³⁹ The Prime Minister explained that the Speaker had not wanted to preside,¹⁴⁰ and as there 'was no difference among the parties' regarding equal franchise, there was no reason to hold one.

In fact, the Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee had determined that a conference would 'almost certainly have very embarrassing consequences,' as the opposition would press for women's franchise at age 21 and other modifications 'unacceptable to the Government's supporters.'¹⁴¹ It was true that the Speaker did not want to chair it, but most of the cabinet did not want it either; Churchill was 'very strongly opposed.'¹⁴² The Parliamentary Labour Party had also apparently decided that 'no good purpose would be served' by a conference.¹⁴³ Eustace Percy wrote a long, strongly worded letter to Baldwin on 2 April 1927, concluding:

I believe we ought to go the whole hog and declare for 21. I believe 25 will be unpopular... But I would infinitely rather that the Government declared for 25, fought it through and took the consequences, than that we should submit the issue to a Conference.¹⁴⁴

In the circumstances it is not surprising that Baldwin felt that the best way forward was to forget the Speaker's Conference in the interests of getting the bill through.

¹³⁸ Pugh, *Women and the women's movement*, pp151-153.

¹³⁹ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1384, Brigadier-General Sir George Cockerill; c1395, Major Goronwy Owen (Liberal).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, cc1471-2, Prime Minister (Baldwin).

¹⁴¹ TNA, CAB 27/336. Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee, 15 Dec 1926.

¹⁴² Ibid, 15 Dec 1926 and 14 Feb 1927. Churchill did initially think a conference would be necessary but changed his mind between the meetings.

¹⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Apr 1927. Quoted in Butler, *The electoral system*, p28.

¹⁴⁴ CUL, Baldwin Papers 52. Eustace Percy to Baldwin, 2 Apr 1927.

The age question: 21 or 25

The idea of equal franchise at the age of 25 had been suggested by many people over the years, inside and outside Parliament. For example Violet Markham in 1925: 'Why not universal suffrage at the age of 25?... Surely the next revision should aim at giving us not a mere increase in numbers, but better quality in our electorate.'¹⁴⁵ It was seriously considered by the government as a possible compromise. Thomas Jones's diary records: 'The Prime Minister... mentioned that Sir John Simon had sounded him out on uniform franchise at 25 but would want some quid pro quo for Liberal support... I gathered... this attempt at a deal had failed.'¹⁴⁶ Indeed in a speech by Baldwin to the Women's Unionist Organisation on 27 May 1927 he said there should be equal franchise at age 25, whereupon 'The meeting rose almost as one person and cheered the Prime Minister for several minutes.' Although Baldwin favoured age 25, he accepted this was not practical; he went on in the same speech to say that it would be a bold person who suggested 21 was not appropriate in Yorkshire or Lancashire.¹⁴⁷

1927: Cabinet Decision

When the government announced its programme for 1927 there was still no cabinet decision on equal franchise and no bill. The Leader of the Opposition declared, 'Has the Government forgotten its pledges?'¹⁴⁸ A disappointed Nancy Astor warned, 'I believe in the Government; but I must say I am growing a little suspicious.'¹⁴⁹ The barrage of questions continued in early 1927.¹⁵⁰ Women's organisations maintained pressure, with a mass meeting on 3 March at Central Hall Westminster, and a deputation to the Prime Minister by the Equal Political Rights Campaign Committee on 8 March, introduced by Lady Astor.¹⁵¹ They were lobbying to influence a special cabinet meeting on 12 April. A letter from Eleanor Rathbone to Eva Hubback shows the stress of the situation:

¹⁴⁵ Violet Markham letter to *The Times*, 21 Feb 1925.

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *Whitehall diary*. Entry for 12 Apr 1927.

¹⁴⁷ HC Deb 18 Apr 1928 vol 216 c239, Sir W Davison (Conservative); c260, Joynton-Hicks.

¹⁴⁸ HC Deb 8 Feb 1927 vol 202 cc21-22, Leader of the Opposition (Ramsay MacDonald). It was also mentioned by other Labour MPs including 8 Feb c43 Pethick-Lawrence, and 9 Feb c130 J H Thomas.

¹⁴⁹ HC Deb 9 Feb 1927 vol 202 cc204-207, Astor.

¹⁵⁰ On 10 Feb by Taylor and Lunn; 15 Mar by Spoor and Kenworthy; 16 Mar by James Gardner (Labour); 28 Mar by Sir John Leigh (Conservative); 6 Apr by Pethick-Lawrence.

¹⁵¹ WL, 2NSE/C/10, NUSEC annual report 1927. Also 2NSE/D/1, Equal Franchise sub-committee.

Dr Jane Walker told us she had had a letter from Major Hills (most confidential) saying he knew *for certain* that the Government had decided on votes at twenty-one without a conference and that we had better do nothing...

Lady Astor is worried because we are pressing for twenty-one; I reassured her it was only on the tactical point. I surmise that possibly the Government has switched to twenty-five... What shall we do about it? My idea is not to protest at the age, but make it perfectly clear that the one thing which concerns us in equal rights... I should get onto Rhondda at once if that happened and try to make her take the same line.¹⁵²

Then, finally, on 13 April 1927 the cabinet decision was announced in a statement by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. Baldwin declared that a bill would be introduced during next session for equal franchise at age 21.¹⁵³ There would be no conference. Dr Jane Walker's letter from Major Hills had proved most accurate. Rathbone sent Hubback a telegram to report: 'Birthday present from Baldwin. [13 April was Hubback's birthday]. Legislation next session. Votes at 21. Conference not mentioned. Greetings and happy returns.'¹⁵⁴

The Cabinet Committee had made no formal report or decision, but presented all its material to the special meeting of the full cabinet on 12 April 1927. After a lengthy discussion to which every cabinet minister contributed, the cabinet finally agreed on age 21 and no conference.¹⁵⁵ Robert Sanders' diary records, 'F E [F E Smith, Lord Birkenhead] and Winston were very much opposed to the idea. It was the PM who carried it in the Cabinet.'¹⁵⁶ As well as Churchill, Birkenhead¹⁵⁷ and Neville Chamberlain, who did not want any change to the franchise, some

¹⁵² Diana Hopkinson, *Family inheritance: a life of Eva Hubback* (Staples Press, 1954), p93 [her emphasis]. MPs Major Hills and Lady Astor were well-known for their support of equal franchise, as was the feminist campaigner Viscountess Rhondda.

¹⁵³ HC Deb 13 Apr 1927 vol 205 cc358-360.

¹⁵⁴ Hopkinson, *Family inheritance*, p93.

¹⁵⁵ TNA, CAB 23/54. As described by Leo Amery in his diary: 'At the Cabinet Stanley [Baldwin] opened with a short resume of the position with regard to our pledges on the women's vote concluding that the only thing we could do was to give it all round at 21. Winston [Churchill] led the opposition with great vehemence and our opinion were then taken all the way round... In the end 21 without a conference prevailed by a considerable majority.' Leo Amery, *The Leo Amery diaries Vol 1, 1896-1929*, eds John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson, 1980). Entry for 12 April 1927, p504.

¹⁵⁶ Bayford, *Real old Tory politics*. Entry for 27 Apr 1927, p232.

¹⁵⁷ Birkenhead wrote to Lord Irwin, 'The Cabinet went mad yesterday and decided to give votes to women at the age of twenty-one.' Quoted in Butler, *The electoral system*, p28.

ministers favoured a compromise with an occupational franchise at age 21 and the residential franchise at age 25.¹⁵⁸ Sylvia Pankhurst's view that by 1928, 'Both men and women had completely assimilated the view that all women were potential voters,'¹⁵⁹ did not apply with regard to the cabinet.

In particular, Churchill vehemently opposed equal franchise. Churchill had a history of opposing women's suffrage, and in future would kill equal pay for schoolteachers by making it a matter of confidence in the government during the Second World War. At the meeting on 12 April 1927, Churchill felt sufficiently strongly to insist that a separate secret minute was recorded, presumably for posterity's sake. This note, handwritten by Maurice Hankey, states that the decision to go for the equal franchise at age 21 was taken by a majority, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked that his dissent be placed on record.¹⁶⁰ Churchill still hoped that Baldwin might grant a free vote in the House of Commons.¹⁶¹ Thomas Jones's diary for 18 May records, 'At no. 10 I saw the Chancellor for a moment, and set his eloquence boiling by asking him what the Prime Minister should say on votes for women... "For God's sake keep him right; keep it all open for the House of Commons to decide by a free vote." I retorted is this the Cabinet view? "It is my view."' ¹⁶²

Continued pressure 1927-1928

If Baldwin hoped that his announcement in April 1927 would end the questions he was wrong, as they continued throughout the rest of the year. Many were about other electoral reform issues (alternative vote, compulsory voting, poor law and election expenses). Questions about

¹⁵⁸ TNA, CAB 27/336. Equal Franchise Cabinet Committee, 14 Feb 1927. Neville Chamberlain, then Health Minister, 'had strong objections to making any changes at all.'

¹⁵⁹ Pankhurst, *The suffragette movement*, p608.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, CAB 23/90B. The envelope containing the secret minute was opened in the 1960s.

¹⁶¹ In a letter dated 12 April 1927, the same day as the cabinet meeting, Churchill wrote to Baldwin suggesting that the 21 or 25 decision might be left to the House to reduce tension. CUL, Baldwin papers 52.

¹⁶² Jones, *Whitehall diary*. Entry for 19 May 1927, p103.

women included whether a free vote would be given on the age question,¹⁶³ the number of voters to be added,¹⁶⁴ ages of voters in other countries,¹⁶⁵ and timing of the bill.¹⁶⁶

Women's organisations also kept the pressure up in late 1927 and 1928. The Equal Rights Political Campaign Committee, a coalition of women's organisations chaired by Lady Rhondda, embarked on a campaign of letter writing and deputations.¹⁶⁷ NUSEC organised a mass meeting for 8 March 1928 at the Queen's Hall and Mortimer Hall. Correspondence shows some women MPs unsure whether to participate, doubtful even at this late point about Baldwin's commitment bearing fruit. Astor initially wrote, 'I think it is a great mistake to go on holding these big meetings and demonstrations, now the Prime Minister has agreed we may imply he may be tempted to go back on his word. I am myself keeping very quiet on this question.' In the end Astor was prominent on the platform at Mortimer Hall, and Baldwin himself spoke at the Queen's Hall. Of the other women MPs, Ellen Wilkinson was happy to help, and the Duchess of Atholl also gave her name in support, showing she had changed her position since 1925 along with her party. Also supportive were the Countess of Iveagh, former MP Mrs Wintringham, and prospective MP Megan Lloyd George. However some Labour MPs, for whom equal franchise was less of a priority, were less inclined. Eleanor Rathbone wrote to the meeting organiser, Dorothy Auld, 'I think it is important to secure at once some of the Labour names on your list, before Dr Marion Phillips has had time to pass the word round to them not to agree.' Whether this happened or not, Susan Lawrence and Margaret Bondfield sent short notes regretting they had no time to help.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ HC Deb 27 Apr 1927 vol 205 cc834-5, Sir John Ganzoni (Conservative). Also 12 Dec vol 211 c1843, William Davison.

¹⁶⁴ HC Deb 3 May 1927 vol 205 c1448, Thurtle; 1 Dec 1927 vol 211 cc.677-8, Major Guy Kindersley (Conservative).

¹⁶⁵ HC Deb 24 May 1927 vol 206 cc1356-7, Sir Evelyn Cecil (Conservative).

¹⁶⁶ HC Deb 2 Jun 1927 vol 207 c542, Gervase Beckett (Conservative); vol 209 18 July c25, Sir Patrick Ford; 21 July c568-9, Ellen Wilkinson.

¹⁶⁷ A deputation from the Equal Rights Political Campaign Committee to the Prime Minister was introduced by Astor on 8 May 1927. See Appendix 5 for full list of attendees and supporters. *The Times*, 9 May 1927.

¹⁶⁸ WL, 2NSE/D/2. Astor letter, 24 Nov 1927; Wilkinson letter, 30 Nov 1927; Rathbone to Auld, 31 Oct 1927.

The Parliamentary Passage of the Equal Franchise Act 1928: The King's Speech

The government finally formally committed to the Equal Franchise Act in the King's speech on 7 February 1928, which included, 'Proposals will be brought before you for amending the laws relating to the Parliamentary and local government franchise.'¹⁶⁹ Introducing the subsequent debate, Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert Ward remarked that opposition was on two grounds;

...firstly that it will increase the uncertainty of general elections, and secondly, that women at the age of 21 are not fit for the full duties of citizenship. I think we can afford to disregard the second objection altogether.... As far as increasing the uncertainty of general elections goes, the results of general elections have ever been on the knees of the gods, and the only result of the proposed legislation will be to transfer a portion of the burden from the knees of the gods to the knees of the goddesses. In that case, unless fashions change, we shall be able to see exactly where we are.¹⁷⁰

The allusion to short skirts was echoed by Thomas Groves: 'I think you would be a magician if you could shelter behind the skirts of a lady today.'¹⁷¹ By and large, the proposed Equal Franchise bill attracted little opposition in the debate on the Kings Speech. MPs kept up the pressure afterwards with a series of questions including how many voters would be added to their own constituencies,¹⁷² and the government published a return showing the estimated increase per constituency.¹⁷³

Second Reading: The place in history

The second reading of the Equal Franchise Bill took place on 29 March 1928, moved by the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks. The debate went on for more than seven hours.¹⁷⁴ The bill passed overwhelmingly on the eventual division, with 387 Ayes and just 10 Noes. The Lord Chancellor later remarked on events in the other place, 'There were in the Division

¹⁶⁹ HC Deb vol 213 7 Feb 1928 c8.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, c12, Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert Ward (Conservative).

¹⁷¹ Ibid, c173, Thomas Groves (Labour).

¹⁷² For example, HC Deb vol 215 27 Mar 1928 c968, Campbell Stephen (Labour).

¹⁷³ Cmd 3119, 1928.

¹⁷⁴ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 cc1359-1482.

Lobbies I will not say ten just men but just ten men who were found to register their opposition to it.¹⁷⁵ Adding the two tellers for the Noes, there were just twelve MPs who felt strongly enough to openly vote against the bill; indeed the government hoped there might not be a division at all.¹⁷⁶ However just because so few MPs voted against it this is not a reason for ignoring the preceding seven hours of debate.

The atmosphere at the second reading debates can be conveyed by the *Evening Standard* headlines:

"Jix" Leads Forth: Home Secretary Unabashed by the Fear of Feminine Rule, MRS PANKHURST IN GALLERY. Protests from Women MPs.¹⁷⁷

Joynson-Hicks painted the Equal Franchise bill in terms of the 'logical conclusion of a series of Reform bills beginning with that of 1832.'¹⁷⁸ 'With a gay carnation in his button-hole,'¹⁷⁹ he stated the women's franchise as it currently stood was a compromise and an experiment which had been amply justified.¹⁸⁰ Snowden, from the opposition bench, took satisfaction in painting a picture of the Labour party convincing the two older parties over time, and gave credit to '60 years of valiant work on the part of women suffrage organisations.'¹⁸¹ Various former suffragists were named during the debate, including Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Constance Lytton, Lydia Becker, Josephine Butler, Mrs Fawcett, and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence - indeed, the latter's husband was present, and declared, 'I have never given a vote in this House that has given me greater pleasure than I shall derive from the vote which I propose to give tonight.'¹⁸² In the Lords, the Earl of Lytton remarked on the women who had fought their battle before the War who were now dead, saying, 'I feel that by passing this Bill

¹⁷⁵ HL Deb 21 May 1928 vol 71 c161, Lord Chancellor (Lord Hailsham, Conservative).

¹⁷⁶ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1366. Joynson-Hicks.

¹⁷⁷ WL, 7AMP/D/5/1. *Evening Standard*, 29 Mar 1928.

¹⁷⁸ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1359, Joynson-Hicks.

¹⁷⁹ WL, 7AMP/D/5/1. *Evening Standard*, 29 Mar 1928.

¹⁸⁰ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1367, Joynson-Hicks.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, c1371 and c1375, Philip Snowden.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, c1430, Pethick-Lawrence; c1450, Viscountess Astor; c1406, Ellen Wilkinson; c1427, Pethick-Lawrence.

today we are, as it were, placing a wreath on the tombs of these early champions.¹⁸³ The Earl's sister, Constance Lytton, had of course been a militant suffragette, whose health had been permanently damaged by force feeding and imprisonment. The franchise was placed in an international as well as historical context; 'We are asking this Parliament to fall into line with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America.'¹⁸⁴

The 'f' word

Joynson-Hicks was careful to categorise the potential new women voters. Of 5,250,000 such women, a large number - 1,800,000 - were already over age 30 and nobody would deny them their right; a further 1,700,000 were married women aged 21-30 and therefore responsible people; another 1,477,000 were single women earning their own living, working side by side with men. The remaining small but worrisome category of unoccupied single women was further broken down to show that 175,000 were aged 25-30, and the potential 'flapper' vote aged between 21-25 consisted of only 216,000.¹⁸⁵ Ellen Wilkinson drew attention to women over 30 who did not have the vote, such as herself. 'When I was first elected... having neither a husband nor furniture, although I was eligible to sit in this House, I was not eligible for a vote.'¹⁸⁶

The *Daily Mail* conducted a prominent campaign during 1927-1928 against the 'flapper vote.' As Adrian Bingham has shown, this was largely due to the attitude of its proprietor Lord Rothermere, who feared the political consequences for the Conservative party, rather than reflecting a more general public anti-feminist attitude.¹⁸⁷ During the 1928 debate Joynson-Hicks was particularly careful not to use the word 'flapper', and Ellen Wilkinson congratulated him 'on his very dexterous avoidance of a term of abuse that has been levelled against young women'.¹⁸⁸ Indeed MPs of all opinions shied away from using the 'f' word. The first to dare use it was Robert Sanders, who was sympathetic to the bill,¹⁸⁹ followed by Hugh Lucas-Tooth, who,

¹⁸³ HL Deb 22 May 1928 vol 71 c297, Earl of Lytton (Conservative).

¹⁸⁴ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1472, the Prime Minister.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, c1369, Joynson-Hicks.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, c1405, Wilkinson.

¹⁸⁷ Bingham, 'Stop the Flapper Vote Folly'.

¹⁸⁸ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1404, Wilkinson.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, c1414, Sir Robert Sanders.

as the youngest Member of the House of Commons, regretted that the bill had not quite been introduced before his 25th birthday, when he would have been able to speak as 'a species of male flapper'.¹⁹⁰ The flapper nettle was grasped by Anthony Eden who said, 'There being, in truth, no actual argument in logical or reason against the Bill, we are faced with terminological inexactitudes like the word "flapper" – a very clear piece of journalese but rather of the penny variety'.¹⁹¹

The age question was considered more fully in the House of Commons at Committee stage, when Alexander Sprot attempted to pass an amendment giving both men and women the vote at the age of 25. He used the example of the Prodigal Son; 'I have no doubt that with the experience he gained between the age of 21 and 25 when he returned home he became as good a citizen as his stay-at-home brother'.¹⁹² Sprot was supported by William Davison, who claimed that the London General Omnibus Company took on drivers only from the age of 26 because of their greater sense of responsibility.¹⁹³ Hugh Cecil argued that democracy functioned better when the electorate was smaller, and, having asked the question, 'How can you raise the credit of democracy?' (to which Members cried 'Go back to 1832!' 'To 1600!'), replied 'I should try to give the franchise to those mature persons whose votes will command respect, those who are 25'.¹⁹⁴ MPs opposing the amendment pointed out anomalies such as young people being able to stand as Parliamentary candidates; the keen interest taken in politics by many young people; unemployment and poverty experienced by young working class people; and that women of 21 did want the vote. Joynson-Hicks called his opponents 'pre-historic men' and Hugh Cecil 'the Piltdown skull itself'.¹⁹⁵ In the division only 16 MPs supported the amendment for age 25, the remaining 359 supporting the government for age 21.

Another attempt was made in the Lords to reduce the age to 25, by Lord Newton who embarked on his amendment 'with reluctance in the regrettable absence of the noble

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, c1421, Sir Hugh Lucas-Tooth (Conservative).

¹⁹¹ Ibid, c1436, Captain Anthony Eden (Conservative).

¹⁹² HC Deb 18 Apr 1928 vol 216 c223, Sir Alexander Sprot (Conservative).

¹⁹³ Ibid, c.241, Sir William Davison. Joynson-Hicks remarked in response that Davison had himself become an MP at age 21, when he could not have been an omnibus conductor.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, c255, Lord Hugh Cecil.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, cc230-1, Naylor; cc236-7, Bondfield; c249, Groves; c257, Joynson-Hicks.

Viscount, Lord Rothermere, who does not consider this place worthy of his notice.¹⁹⁶ It is curious that Rothermere was not present given the battles against the bill in the *Daily Mail*. Adrian Bingham notes Rothermere's use of his son, Edward Harmsworth, to argue his line in the Commons;¹⁹⁷ yet it is surely noteworthy that Rothermere did not conduct the battle in person in the Lords, where he could have exercised personal influence.¹⁹⁸ In Rothermere's absence, Newton argued that men had endeavoured to get the vote for over six hundred years while women had got it in less than ten, 'and we ironically speak of them as the weaker sex.'¹⁹⁹ Opposition was led by Cecil of Chelwood (Lord Robert Cecil) on the grounds that this was not a good issue for the Lords to oppose the Commons. Newton's amendment failed with 41 votes to 87; the closest division of all the votes on this bill.

The 'Just Ten' men against

In the Commons at second reading, nine MPs spoke against the bill. All were well aware of the odds against them, Mr Samuel Samuel declaring, 'I have not a ghost of a chance of preventing the passage of this bill.'²⁰⁰ But the arguments were still made, however anachronistic they may have sounded. Brigadier-General Sir George Cockerill was the first one brave enough to speak, moving to deny the bill its second reading. Despite declaring, 'I am not a die-hard; I am almost a feminist,' his arguments were reminiscent of pre-war attitudes. The main objection he voiced was that women would be put in a permanent majority in constituencies ('Hear hear!' said Nancy Astor) and he 'would prefer to see, quite frankly, men put in the supremacy.'²⁰¹ Colonel Applin followed Cockerill and took his arguments further, arguing that the bill would 'permit women to take over the finances of this country.' Also that 'hitherto, men have done all the heavy work in this country,' ('Oh really! Good gracious!' said Ellen Wilkinson).²⁰² E C Harmsworth, son of Lord Rothermere, argued that, 'Every time you dilute the electorate you

¹⁹⁶ HL Deb 12 Jun 1928 vol 71 c408, Lord Newton.

¹⁹⁷ Bingham, 'Stop the Flapper Vote Folly', pp26-27.

¹⁹⁸ Rothermere's biographer says 'In 1928 he refused to serve the publicity needs of the Conservative Party'. D George Boyce, 'Harmsworth, Harold Sidney, first Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940)', *ODNB*.

¹⁹⁹ HL Deb 12 Jun 1928 vol 71 c411, Lord Newton.

²⁰⁰ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c1399, Mr Samuel Samuel (Conservative).

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, c1379-80, Brigadier-General Sir George Cockerill, Astor.

²⁰² *Ibid*, cc1391-2, Colonel Reginald Applin (Conservative), Wilkinson.

are weakening democratic institutions.¹²⁰³ Other speakers included Charles Oman, and Frederick Hall, who declared boldly:

I have always believed that, as was the case prior to 1918, the country should be represented in this House by the male sex. Some hon. Members may think that is a rather surprising view to take, but that had been the practice and the recognised custom during hundreds of years of Parliamentary government, and the legislation of this country had been conducted in a very satisfactory manner. *[Interruption]*.²⁰⁴

Various MPs and peers noted darkly that some cabinet ministers known for their opposition to equal franchise were not present to speak and vote on the bill, Churchill in particular drawing comment.²⁰⁵ Birkenhead explained that Churchill was 'very gravely engaged with the problem of his Budget.'²⁰⁶ Churchill's correspondence shows that he did not expect a vote. Clementine Churchill wrote to him about 'your abstention in the Flappers Vote Division!... really as it was bound to go thro' it was naughty of you not to vote,'²⁰⁷ to which Churchill replied, 'Nobody expected there would be a division, as only about ten people were known to have the courage of their convictions.'²⁰⁸ Subsequently, Churchill was present during Committee stage in the Commons when there was a division on age 21 versus 25, and followed the government line in favour of age 21.

The significance of the division

The tiny opposition to the bill at second reading, with just ten votes against,²⁰⁹ provoked a range of reactions. The *Evening Standard* used it to show the insignificance of the franchise; 'The lesson of this is not that the Bill ought not to be passed, but rather that it does not matter

²⁰³ Ibid, c1411, Harmsworth.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, c1431, Oman; c1443, Hall.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, c1438, Anthony Eden.

²⁰⁶ HL Deb 22 May 1928 vol 71 c250, Earl of Birkenhead.

²⁰⁷ Churchill, *Winston S Churchill*, p1245. Clementine to Winston, 4 Apr 1928.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p1247. Winston to Clementine, 5 Apr 1928.

²⁰⁹ The 'just ten men', all Conservatives, were: George Balfour, A B Boyd-Carpenter, William James Bull, C C Craig, Sir F Hall, E C Harmsworth, Major G M Kindersley, Colonel Sir Joseph Nall, Sir C W Oman and Samuel Samuel. Cockerill and Applin acted as tellers for the Noes.

if it is passed or not.²¹⁰ The *Daily Mail*, on the other hand, saw a party split with many anti-suffragists having absented themselves: 'Flapper Vote Sensation – 146 Missing Conservatives – Party Dissension Talk.'²¹¹ The *Times* reported that actually 136 Conservatives had been absent; of these 18 had been paired with Labour members, 33 were abroad, 15 were ill and 13 were speaking in the country, leaving just 56 unaccounted for.²¹² Some of the absent MPs would undoubtedly have voted against; Hugh Cecil was one of the sick MPs, and it is clear from his remarks at committee stage that he would have joined the votes against had he been present.²¹³ Some peers were sceptical as to the size of the Commons division, on the grounds that Conservative MPs had been ordered by the Conservative hierarchy to pass the bill. Viscount Bertie of Thame told of an anonymous member who had said of the bill, "'Many of us do not like it, but the word has been passed round that we are not even to criticise it.'"²¹⁴

Some analysis of the numbers involved is necessary to see just how typical the numbers of MPs present and voting were. There were 615 MPs in the House of Commons.²¹⁵ In this division 387 MPs were in favour and ten against, a total of 397 MPs voting, with 218 MPs absent. This was one of 366 divisions during the 1928 Parliamentary session. These had an average of 318 MPs voting and 297 MPs absent.²¹⁶ The number of MPs in attendance to vote on the second reading of the Equal Franchise bill was *above* average – quite substantially so. If the 366 divisions are ranked in order of the number of MPs voting, the Equal Franchise bill ranks at number 34 out of the 366, i.e. in the top ten per cent. Figure 4.1 displays the distribution of the numbers of MPs voting in divisions. The Equal Franchise vote was one of nineteen divisions in which between 380 and 400 MPs voted; clearly one of the better attended divisions of the session.

²¹⁰ WL, 7AMP/D/5/1. *Evening Standard*, 30 Mar 1928.

²¹¹ Bingham, 'Stop the Flapper Vote Folly', p21.

²¹² *The Times*, 3 Apr 1928.

²¹³ HC Deb 18 Apr 1928 vol 216 c250, Lord H Cecil.

²¹⁴ HL Deb 22 May 1928 vol 71 c237, Viscount Bertie of Thame (Conservative).

²¹⁵ Colin Rallings, Michael Thrasher and F W S Craig, *British electoral facts, 1832-1999* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000).

²¹⁶ Data compiled from *House of Commons Votes and Proceedings – Divisions 1928*. PA, HC/CL/JO/6/1376.

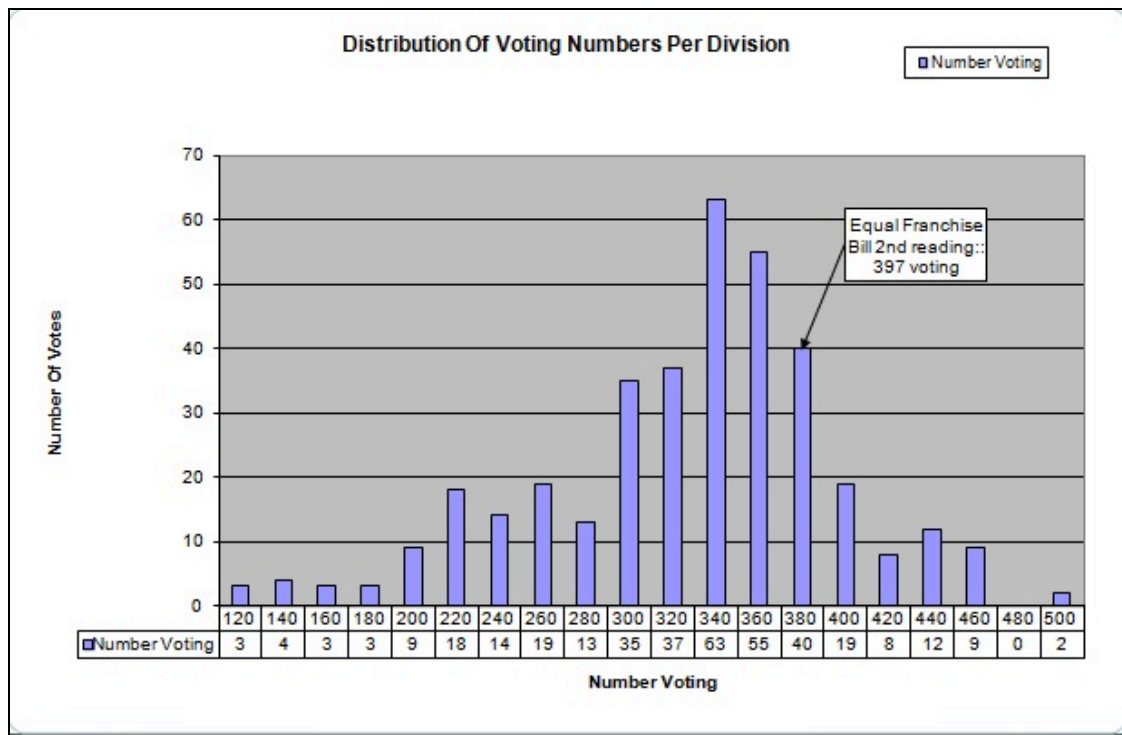


Figure 4.1 Distribution of voting numbers per division, 1928

Women MPs

The women MPs were prominent in the equal franchise debates. The Countess of Iveagh appealed to the House 'not to let it be thought that this Measure was granted in any grudging or cavilling spirit.' Ellen Wilkinson argued, 'Are British women to be kept down to the level of any backward races that happen to be under the British crown?' Margaret Bondfield said, 'Since I have been able to vote at all, I have never felt the same enthusiasm because the vote was the consequence of possessing property rather than the consequence of being a human being.'²¹⁷ Nancy Astor's speech included a passionate declaration on the significance of votes for women:

I had the privilege of being the first woman in the House of Commons, and sometimes I used to doubt whether it was a privilege. When I stood up and asked questions affecting women and children, social and moral questions, I used to be shouted at for five or 10 minutes at a time. That was when they thought that I was rather a freak, a voice crying in the wilderness... [in] the 12 years before they [women] had the vote, there were only five measures passed dealing with women and with things affecting

²¹⁷ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 c135, Countess of Iveagh (Conservative); c1403, Wilkinson; c1415, Bondfield.

women and children. From 1918 onwards, we have had 20 Measures passed affecting women and children.²¹⁸

The *Morning Post* reported that Lady Iveagh had not contemplated joining in the debate, but was spurred on by the remarks of Sir George Cockerill. It is interesting that Iveagh spoke in support as she had apparently not been sure about the wisdom of women voting a year before, when she wrote to Baldwin, 'I am getting more concerned than ever that posterity is going to condemn the vote ever having been given to women – but we can't put back the clock!'²¹⁹ After the division, the *Morning Post* reported, 'Lady Astor waved an elated glove; the Women Members smiled at each other benignly.'²²⁰

House of Lords

The debates on the Equal Franchise Bill were much shorter in the Lords than the Commons; understandably as the bill affected the Commons directly. However the Lords were sufficiently interested to allow for two days of debate rather than one.²²¹ There was plenty of hostility still to be expressed. The Duke of Northumberland said, 'May I remark that two things which are essentially different from one another cannot be equal, and therefore to talk about equality of the sexes is ridiculous,'²²² to which the Earl of Lytton retorted, 'Nothing could be more different from the noble Duke than a lump of lead, yet he would deny that both have an equal weight.'²²³ Nevertheless, most Lords who spoke were very much in favour, while expressing caveats about the lack of broader electoral reform. Lord Birkenhead, despite his personal antagonism, remained loyal to the government and voted for the bill, as its 'paradoxical champion.'²²⁴ Lord Banbury of Southam, who had long opposed women's franchise bills in the Commons, moved an amendment to delay the second reading for six months, which would have killed the bill. It was defeated 114 votes to 35: there were more than 'just ten men' against the bill in the Lords, but the majority was still decisive.

²¹⁸ Ibid, cc1452-3, Viscountess Astor.

²¹⁹ CUL, Baldwin Papers 49. Letter 14 Nov 1927 [her emphasis].

²²⁰ WL, 7AMP/D/5/1. *Morning Post*, 30 Mar 1928.

²²¹ HL Deb 16 May 1928 vol 71 c37, Lord Chancellor.

²²² HL Deb 21 May 1928 vol 71 c178, Duke of Northumberland.

²²³ HL Deb 22 May 1928 vol 71 c231, Earl of Lytton.

²²⁴ Ibid, c253, Earl of Birkenhead.

Other electoral reform

The Equal Franchise Bill only covered equal franchise, and few other electoral reform issues. The Labour party was sorry that it did not abolish plural voting in the form of the university franchise and the business occupational franchise, and did not deal with redistribution of constituency boundaries so as to correct disparities.²²⁵ An instruction was added at committee stage stating that the committee had the power to deal with election expenses, and the resulting debate was long, contentious and carried on into a second day, and appeared again at report stage. Arthur Henderson successfully introduced a clause to reduce the maximum scale of expenses from seven pence to sixpence per voter, but the debate went on party political lines as to whether this was still too high or low, and if it should differ between counties and boroughs. Very little of the argument had anything to do with equal franchise other than a few mentions of how having 'a woman's side of politics' would require extra meetings.²²⁶

Apart from election expenses, there was little scope for further electoral reform. The title of the bill had been chosen with care: it was 'to assimilate' the law on the franchise, not 'to amend.' It had been drafted by Parliamentary Counsel Sir William Graham-Harrison with W G Allen from the Home Office in November 1927 to ensure that no wider constitutional changes could be made.²²⁷ In Parliament at committee stage, James Hope made it clear that the Committee could not amend the general electoral law other than those aspects covered by the bill. So on plural voting they could consider the residential and business qualifications (as these were included in the bill) but not the university qualification (which was not). Labour MPs including Bondfield and Pethick-Lawrence tried hard to move amendments on the 'fancy franchise' of the business qualification at committee stage, but failed.²²⁸ Snowden tried unsuccessfully again at report stage.²²⁹ Nancy Astor (fresh from 'a great golfing triumph, in which she demonstrated not only the equality of women but the inferiority of men'²³⁰) said 'I

²²⁵ HC Deb 29 Mar 1928 vol 215 cc1373-74, Philip Snowden; c1466, Henderson; c1461, Rhys Morris.

²²⁶ HC Deb 18 Apr 1928 vol 216 c219; c26, Peto.

²²⁷ TNA, HO 45/13153.

²²⁸ HC Deb 18 Apr 1928 vol 216 c220, The Chairman (James Hope, Conservative); cc283-86.

²²⁹ HC Deb 7 May 1928 vol 217 c55, Snowden.

²³⁰ Ibid, c69. Robert Morrison (Labour Co-operative). The only woman in the annual Parliamentary Handicap golf tournament at Princes, Sandwich, Astor beat Lord Lovat by 4 and 3. *The Times*, 7 May 1928.

feel as long as men have this absurd vote, women should have it too,²³¹ which sums up the situation.

Conclusion

The Equal Franchise Act obtained Royal Assent on 2 July 1928. Millicent Fawcett went to the House of Lords to see it conferred, but unfortunately 'she was less than a minute too late.'²³² There was much rejoicing among women's organisations. The WFL held a victory breakfast for 250 guests at Hotel Cecil on 4 July, where a congratulatory letter from Joynson-Hicks was read out.²³³ Baldwin similarly wrote a letter of congratulations to Fawcett.²³⁴ The Equal Rights Political Campaign Committee held a reception on 24 October 1928 including a performance of a play from 1909 titled 'How the vote was won.'²³⁵ The NUSEC annual report for 1928 declares 'This report marks the close of a momentous ten years in the history of the women's movement.'²³⁶

The immediate effect of the Equal Franchise Act was that women voted on the same terms as men from the General Election of 1929. Women's organisations threw themselves into educating the new women voters as to how to register.²³⁷ Publications followed explaining the significance of having the vote.²³⁸ Baldwin was resolute in expressing his faith that the new women voters would use their vote sensibly.²³⁹ There was interest in tracing the role of the

²³¹ HC Deb 7 May 1928 vol 217 c68, Viscountess Astor.

²³² *The Guardian*, 3 Jul 1928.

²³³ WL, 7AMP/D/1/1. Celebratory issue of *The Vote*, 13 Jul 1928.

²³⁴ WL, Autograph Letter Collection 9/01/1194.

²³⁵ WL pamphlet. Equal Rights Political Campaign Committee: 'Victory: and after celebrations: programme of reception at Caxton Hall, 1928.'

²³⁶ WL, 2NSE/C/11. NUSEC annual report 1928.

²³⁷ WL pamphlet. NUSEC: 'Qualifications required by voters: how to get on the Parliamentary and local government register, 1929.'

²³⁸ For example, Amabel Williams-Ellis and L A Plummer, *Why should I vote? A handbook for electors* (London: Gerald Howe Ltd, 1929); E M White, *The girl voter: talks on her inheritance, her responsibilities and her opportunities* (London: Herbert Russell, 1930); Katharine Marjorie Atholl, *Women and politics* (London: P Allan, 1931).

²³⁹ For example, in his article titled 'Politics are not a circus: My Faith in the Sane Judgment of the New Woman Voter this Week' in the *Sunday Graphic* 26 May 1929. CUL, Baldwin Papers 38.

new voters,²⁴⁰ and for whom they would be likely to vote.²⁴¹ The press and others tried to assess the significance of the 'flapper' vote on the Conservative's election defeat. The election saw 14 women MPs elected and the appointment of Margaret Bondfield as the first woman cabinet minister.

There is a tendency among historians to see the Equal Franchise Act as a mere postscript to the 1918 Act, ten years after the main suffrage battle. Of course this is true in the sense that the suffrage aspect of the campaign for gender equality was finally over. Yet the achievement of equal franchise was also a springboard for future work up to and beyond the Second World War, enabling the women's movement to move on from the vote and place renewed emphasis on issues such as equal pay. At the Women's Freedom League victory breakfast, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence remarked that someone had said to her, 'Oh Here you are, in at the death!' to which she replied, 'In at the death? No, I'm at the birth!'²⁴² Equal franchise marked the beginning of a new phase, and at least one woman MP looked back on equal franchise with renewed significance. Ellen Wilkinson wrote in 1935 that, after the Act had achieved Royal Assent, she passed a group of old suffrage acquaintances wanting to celebrate. 'I was very superior. "Is there any point celebrating the fag-ends of tidying up? The battle was won in 1918." But now, 'I have an apology to make.' Wilkinson considered the women being turned out of industry and employment in Germany and elsewhere, and concluded 'It seems to me that the time is coming when we shall have to revive those feminist activities which we so thankfully closed down.'²⁴³

²⁴⁰ F W Doidge to Beaverbrook, 6 May 1929: 'One... point to make about the "hustings" is the fact that so many young women are in attendance.' CUL, Baldwin Papers 55.

²⁴¹ W A S Hewins to Baldwin, 9 Apr 1929: 'In the East End of London... they are not revolutionary but rather Conservative, but nevertheless inclined to vote Labour.' CUL, Baldwin Papers 36.

²⁴² WL, 7AMP/D/1/1.

²⁴³ WL, 7AMP/E/2. 'Ellen Wilkinson's Warning to Men and Wives' in *The Star*, 19 Sep 1935.

Chapter Five

'There are many committees and not enough women, they simply won't go round'¹:

Women and Standing Committee service

A leaflet issued after the Second World War titled '*Our Women MPs: What They Have Done For Us*', declared:

Always too few to counterbalance their 600 odd male colleagues, they have yet by debate and committee service made their mark on the law-making of the last 30 years in a degree entirely out of proportion to their numbers.²

Of the two contributions mentioned - by debate and by committee service – the first four chapters of this thesis have analysed the role of women MPs in both Parliamentary debates and committees for specific Acts of Parliament. However, although analysis of the early women MPs' contribution to debates has been carried out by historians, no such research has been done with regard to committee service. In *Women at Westminster* Pamela Brookes examined women in Parliament over a long period, taking a broad approach in which Parliamentary committees were mentioned, but not in detail.³ Beverley Parker Stobaugh carried out an exhaustive analysis into women MPs in 1978, but concentrated almost entirely on their backgrounds rather than their work in Parliament.⁴ Brian Harrison's 1986 article on the early woman MPs concentrated largely on their contributions to debate, counting the Hansard columns and analysing topics on which they spoke.⁵ Martin Pugh's analysis of what early women MPs made of their time in Parliament built on Harrison's research, focussing on their speeches in Parliament and contribution to legislation; but committees are not mentioned.⁶ In *Women in the House* in 1979 Elizabeth Vallance wrote that 'Women have

¹ Edith Picton-Turbervill, *Life is Good: an autobiography* (Frederick Muller Ltd, 1939), p172.

² Leaflet issued by the Women's Electoral Campaign, part of the 'Women for Westminster' movement formed in 1943 to encourage the adoption of women as Parliamentary candidates. WL, 7/TBG/1/12.

³ Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: an account of women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967).

⁴ Beverley P Stobaugh, *Women and Parliament 1918-1970* (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1978).

⁵ Brian Harrison, 'Women in a men's house: the women MPs, 1919-1945', *Historical Journal* 29(3) 1986.

⁶ Martin Pugh, *Women and the women's movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd ed 2000).

always made a contribution, well in proportion to their numbers, in Parliamentary committees,' but did not produce evidence to substantiate this.⁷ Harrison gave two sentences to their role in committees:

Much less is known about women MPs' conduct in committees... but in the two sessions of 1929-31 a higher percentage of women MPs than men were summoned to serve on standing committees, and the women attended more assiduously. On select committees over the same period, however, women's attendance surpasses that of the men in only the first of the two sessions.⁸

Clearly not much is known. This chapter and chapter 6 will consider this hitherto neglected area, the contribution of women MPs to Parliamentary standing and select committees, up to 1945. It will analyse not only attendance, but also the number of committees on which women sat; on what kind of committees they sat; and their contribution. It will also consider the general position of women in relation to Parliamentary committees in the early twentieth century, tracing the contribution of women acting as witnesses and advisors before and after 1918. Chapter 7 will consider the contribution of women committee staff, as part of a broader analysis of women staff in Parliament.

House of Commons standing committees were appointed from the late 19th century to examine legislation in detail.⁹ Bills introduced in either House went through first and second readings, followed by a committee stage. In the Lords this was usually taken on the floor of the House (a Committee of the Whole House); in the Commons the bill was usually referred to a standing committee. Unlike a select committee, there were no witnesses or evidence taken at a standing committee, nor input from specialist advisors; it was a stage of Parliamentary legislation, and only MPs could participate. At a standing committee the MPs present examined the bill clause by clause, debated each one as necessary, considered amendments, and voted on amendments as required. The debate was not about the principles behind the

⁷ Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House*, (London: Athlone Press, 1979), p102.

⁸ Harrison, 'Women in a men's house', p633.

⁹ Before 1882, committee stage in the Commons took place in a committee of the whole House; Gladstone instituted standing committees to meet the situation caused by Irish obstruction. From 1907 referral of bills to standing committees became routine. W Ivor Jennings, *Parliament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), pp265-279. Legislation was occasionally referred to a select committee not as a legislative stage but in order to undertake a broader investigation and enable witnesses from outside Parliament to be called (see chapter 6).

bill (which took place at second reading) but about the merits of each individual clause. There were typically between 30 and 50 members on a standing committee, and there might be between 20 and 30 MPs in attendance at a meeting, a marked difference in scale from a full debate in the Commons chamber, where a couple of hundred MPs or more might be present.¹⁰

How many women were appointed to standing committees?

In late 1919 Nancy Astor became the first woman MP to take her seat, paving the way for women to be summoned as members of standing committees for the first time. Edith Picton-Turbervill, Labour MP 1929-1931, wrote of her experiences in Commons committees:

For almost every committee the chairman nowadays says he would like to have a woman in it. There are many committees and not enough women, they simply won't go round, so whereas many a man can escape Parliamentary committees it is impossible for the women members - even if they wished – to do so.¹¹

Membership of standing committees was determined by the Committee for Selection, a cross-party committee of members with long Parliamentary experience, who nominated members to serve with regard to the composition of the House and influence of party whips.¹² Table 5.1 shows for each session the total numbers of MPs and women MPs; the numbers serving on standing committees; and the numbers of standing committees and standing committees with a woman member. Figure 5.1 illustrates part of this data, the number of women on standing committees as compared to the number of women MPs.¹³ No standing committees were summoned during sessions 1939/40 to 1943/44.

¹⁰ Jennings calls standing committees 'miniature Parliaments.' Ibid, p270.

¹¹ Picton-Turbervill, *Life is Good*, p172.

¹² Jennings, *Parliament*, p267. Regrettably, but unsurprisingly, there are no records of deliberation by the Committee of Selection.

¹³ The data in the tables in this chapter has been compiled from standing committee returns. These were printed in *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* up to 1931. Thereafter they were laid but not printed, and can be found in the House of Commons Unprinted Papers series in the Parliamentary Archives. PA, HC/CL/JO/10.

Session	No of MPs	No of women MPs	No of MPs on standing committees	No of women MPs on standing committees	No of standing committees	No of standing committees with a woman member
1920	707	1	477	1	6	3
1921	707	1	410	1	5	1
1922	615	2	416	2	5	4
1923	615	3	447	2	5	3
1924	615	8	428	6	5	4
1924-5	615	4	448	4	5	5
1926	615	6	459	5	5	5
1927	615	6	393	6	5	3
1928	615	7	367	6	4	4
1928-9	615	10	252	4	3	2
1929-30	615	14	394	13	5	4
1930-31	615	16	412	11	5	5
1931-32	615	15	319	9	4	2
1932-33	615	15	341	11	4	4
1933-34	615	15	357	10	5	5
1934-35	615	14	312	9	4	3
1935-36	615	9	402	8	5	4
1936-37	615	9	412	9	5	5
1937-38	615	10	376	10	4	4
1938-39	615	12	426	11	5	4
1944-45	615	14	239	6	3	3

Table 5.1: Number of women MPs on standing committees

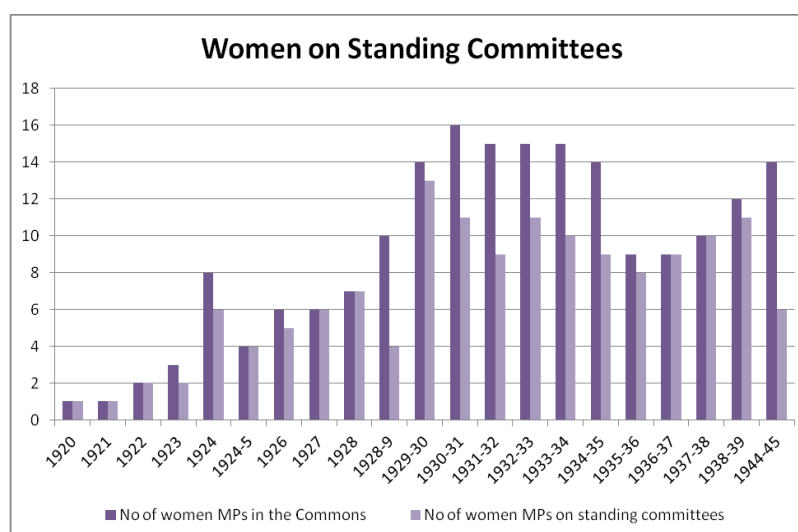


Figure 5.1 - Number of women MPs on standing committees

The numbers of women involved were of course very small, but they bear out Picton-Turbervill's observation. Most standing committees in the inter-war period had a woman member; and most women MPs in the inter-war period sat on a standing committee.¹⁴ Standing committee service was therefore a typical part of the work of a woman MP and merits the same analysis given to women MPs' contribution to debates in the Commons chamber.

Which standing committees had women members?

In the interwar period five standing committees were appointed each session, numbered A, B, C and D¹⁵ plus the Scottish Standing Committee ('Sc'). Approximately 40 MPs were appointed to each standing committee, although a typical attendance might be half that; not all members were summoned to every meeting, and MPs were added and removed from a standing committee according to interest or expertise.¹⁶ Table 5.2 shows the women MPs and their standing committees with the number of times they were summoned (this figure is only available from 1926 onwards) and attended.

Name	Session	Standing Committees	Summoned	Attended
Adamson, Jennie (Lab)	1938-1939	B	17	9
Astor, Nancy (Con)	1920	C, D, E	-	11
	1921	D	-	3
	1922	A	-	1
	1923	C, D	-	4
	1925	A, D	-	7
	1926	A	2	2
	1927	A	6	1
	1929-1930	Sc	2	2

¹⁴ Only four women in this period escaped standing committee service altogether. Ruth Dalton and Leah Manning (both Labour) were MPs for less than a year; Mary Pickford (Conservative) was largely occupied with Select Committee work (see chapter 6), and Lady Apsley (Conservative) was MP during wartime (1943-1945), when few standing committees were summoned.

¹⁵ The numbers of standing committees established varied according to the legislative load. In 1920 there was an additional Standing Committee E. Standing Committee D was not appointed in sessions 1928, 1931-32, 1932-3, 1934-35 and 1937-38, when there were fewer bills to consider; and in the very short session 1928-29 there was no Standing Committee C or D.

¹⁶ Jennings explained 'where a standing committee is considering an Agriculture Bill, a member who does not know, and does not care to know, the difference between a turnip and a mangel-wurzel, either ceases to be a member or does not attend.' Jennings, *Parliament*, p268.

Name	Session	Standing Committees	Summoned	Attended
	1930-1931	Sc	3	0
	1931-1932	B	14	10
	1933-1934	B, D	30	20
	1935-1936	A	15	7
	1936-1937	B	19	15
Atholl, Duchess of (Con)	1924	A, C, Sc	-	22
	1925	C, Sc	-	6
	1926	C, Sc	17	1
	1927	Sc	7	2
	1928	Sc	11	0
	1928-1929	Sc	2	2
	1929-1930	B, Sc	39	23
	1930-1931	Sc	18	16
	1931-1932	Sc	5	0
	1932-1933	C, Sc	16	3
	1933-1934	D, Sc	30	9
	1934-1935	Sc	29	19
	1935-1936	A, Sc	29	15
	1936-1937	Sc	8	2
	1937-1938	Sc	16	2
Bentham, Ethel (Lab)	1929-1930	B	1	1
Bondfield, Margaret (Lab)	1927	A	1	0
	1928	A	6	5
Cazalet (Cazelet-Keir from 1939), Thelma (Con)	1932-1933	C	3	2
	1934-1935	A	20	19
	1935-1936	A	11	9
	1936-1937	C	1	1
	1937-1938	B	2	1
	1938-1939	B	5	2
Copeland, Ida (Con)	1931-1932	B	22	16
	1932-1933	B	18	14
	1933-1934	D	19	13
	1934-1935	C	1	0
Davidson, Viscountess (Con)	1937-1938	C, Sc	28	26
	1938-1939	A	27	14
Graves, Marjorie (Con)	1931-1932	B	19	16
	1932-1933	C	3	1
	1933-1934	A	7	4
	1934-1935	C	2	2
Hamilton, Mary Agnes (Lab)	1929-1930	A, D	6	6

Name	Session	Standing Committees	Summoned	Attended
Hardie, Agnes (Lab)	1937-1938	B, Sc	30	11
	1938-1939	A, Sc	29	17
	1944-1945	Sc	6	2
Horsbrugh, Florence (Con)	1931-1932	B, Sc	19	12
	1932-1933	B, C, Sc	24	16
	1933-1934	C, Sc	20	16
	1934-1935	Sc	28	23
	1935-1936	A, Sc	18	12
	1936-1937	B, Sc	27	20
	1937-1938	A, C, Sc	38	20
	1938-1939	A, C, Sc	32	17
	1944-1945	A, Sc	18	7
Iveagh, Countess of (Con)	1929-1930	B, Sc	3	1
	1930-1931	C, Sc	2	0
	1932-1933	C	1	1
Jewson, Dorothy (Lab)	1924	A	-	5
Lawrence, Susan (Lab)	1924	A, B	-	8
	1926	B	15	14
	1927	A, D	38	25
	1928	B, C	30	22
	1928-1929	A	3	3
	1929-1930	A, B	36	32
	1930-1931	A, D, Sc	30	30
Lee, Jennie (Lab)	1929-1930	B, Sc	51	24
	1930-1931	Sc	18	12
Lloyd George, Megan (Lib)	1929-1930	A	15	6
	1930-1931	B	12	11
	1935-1936	A	5	2
	1936-1937	D	3	1
	1937-1938	B	4	0
	1938-1939	A, B, C	8	0
	1944-45	A	12	0
Mosley, Cynthia (Lab)	1929-1930	A	36	10
Noel-Buxton, Lucy (Lab)	1930-1931	B	44	42
Philipson, Mabel (Con)	1924	C	-	6
	1925	A, B, C, D	-	15
	1926	A, B, D	17	13
	1927	A, Sc	8	2
	1928	A	6	5
Phillips, Marion (Lab)	1929-1930	A	15	5

Name	Session	Standing Committees	Summoned	Attended
	1930-1931	C	1	0
Picton-Turbervill, Edith (Lab)	1929-1930	A	42	26
	1930-1931	C, D	23	17
Rathbone, Eleanor (Ind)	1929-1930	A, Sc	17	15
	1930-1931	D	22	10
	1932-1933	A	6	0
	1933-1934	A, C	26	17
	1934-1935	C	2	1
	1935-1936	A, B, C	39	17
	1936-1937	A, B, C	55	19
	1937-1938	B	25	7
	1938-1939	B	10	1
Runciman, Hilda (Lib)	1928	A, C	15	7
	1928-1929	A	5	3
Runge, Norah (Con)	1931-1932	B	22	21
	1932-1933	B, C	7	7
Shaw, Helen (Con)	1931-1932	B, Sc	19	16
	1932-1933	Sc	15	12
	1933-1934	Sc	19	19
	1934-1935	Sc	28	25
Summerskill, Edith (Lab)	1938-1939	C	2	1
	1944-1945	A	12	7
Tate, Mavis (Con)	1931-1932	B	14	12
	1932-1933	A	15	13
	1933-1934	C, D	20	14
	1936-1937	A, D	31	11
	1937-1938	A	23	9
	1938-1939	A	34	12
	1944-1945	B	2	0
Terrington, Lady (Lib)	1924	B	-	6
Ward, Irene (Con)	1932-1933	A	6	3
	1933-1934	A, C	30	23
	1934-1935	A	20	20
	1935-1936	A, B	11	5
	1936-1937	A, C	11	10
	1937-1938	B, Sc	26	11
	1938-1939	A, B	40	14
Ward, Sarah (Con)	1931-1932	B	8	3
	1933-1934	A, C	50	27
	1934-1935	A	20	14
Wilkinson, Ellen (Lab)	1925	A, D	-	6

Name	Session	Standing Committees	Summoned	Attended
	1926	A	5	1
	1927	Sc	1	0
	1928	A	6	5
	1928-1929	A	5	0
	1929-1930	A	28	23
	1930-1931	A, D	28	18
	1935-1936	A, C	12	7
	1936-1937	D	6	0
	1937-1938	A, B	21	12
	1938-1939	A, C	11	9
Wintringham, Margaret (Lib)	1922	A, B, C, D	-	17
	1923	B, C, D	-	3
	1924	A, B	-	13
Wright (Rathbone to 1941), Beatrice (Con)	1944-1945	A, B	14	4

Table 5.2: List of women MPs, the number of standing committees they were summoned to and attended

Bills were referred to specific standing committees. There was no subject pattern as to which bill went to which lettered committee. One or two of the standing committees normally spent most of its time on one or two government bills, and another would consider a variety of private members' bills. The Scottish Standing Committee considered legislation affecting Scotland, and the Scottish women MPs such as the Duchess of Atholl and Florence Horsbrugh were appointed to the Scottish Standing Committee. Both women and men tended to be added as members of a specific standing committee if it was considering something in which they had a special interest or expertise.¹⁷ The subjects women spoke on are considered further below.

How do women's standing committee attendance records compare to men?

Table 5.3 shows the number of times both men and women MPs were summoned to a standing Committee compared to the number of times they attended (these figures are only available from 1926 onwards). Figure 5.2 illustrates the comparative percentages.

¹⁷ For example Nancy Astor was appointed to standing committees considering temperance reform bills, and Eleanor Rathbone to standing committees considering family allowances bills.

Session	Men summoned	Men attended	Men % attended	Women summoned	Women attended	Women % attended
1926	7849	4628	59.0%	43	21	48.8%
1927	6126	3251	53.1%	61	30	49.2%
1928	5076	2670	52.6%	100	58	58.0%
1928-29	1043	427	40.9%	15	8	53.3%
1929-30	8958	4990	55.7%	260	168	64.6%
1930-31	9674	6289	65.0%	201	156	77.6%
1931-32	3588	2285	63.7%	142	106	74.6%
1932-33	4507	2565	56.9%	114	72	63.2%
1933-34	6221	3411	54.8%	251	162	64.5%
1934-35	4576	2627	57.4%	149	123	82.6%
1935-36	5704	3425	60.0%	140	74	52.9%
1936-37	5251	3214	61.2%	161	79	49.1%
1937-38	5882	3477	59.1%	223	99	44.4%
1938-39	6236	3268	52.4%	215	96	44.7%
1944-45	1592	946	59.4%	64	20	31.3%

Table 5.3: Men's and women's attendances on standing committees

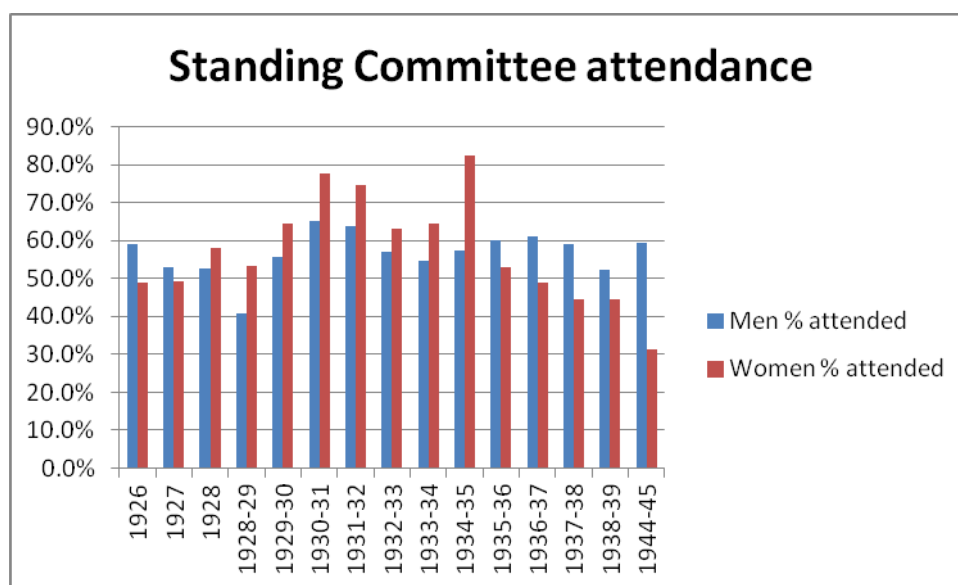


Figure 5.2 Men's and women's attendances on standing committees compared

From this it can be seen that the average female attendance was consistently better than the male between 1928 and 1934-35, more than half the period under consideration, but declined thereafter. The number of women MPs decreased after the 1935 general election, and they contributed less than some of their predecessors. On the basis of attendance in this period, however, it appears that women MPs treated their standing committee work more conscientiously than their male colleagues. Their attendance, however, does not mean they

necessarily spoke; the next aspect to consider is therefore the contribution of the women members to debate in these committees.

How much did women contribute when they did attend?

House of Commons standing committee debates were published in a separate Hansard series from 1919.¹⁸ The extent of the contribution of women MPs to standing committees has been evaluated from the Hansard record, and follows the methodology used by Brian Harrison in his analysis of the women MPs' contribution to debates in the Commons chamber: that is, counting the number of lines spoken by individual women MPs and comparing with the men.¹⁹ This is a crude method, verbosity being no guarantee of considered content, but it gives an idea of the relative contribution of women and men, and, to some degree, of each individual woman. The content of the debates is considered later in this chapter. Using this methodology enables comparison of standing committee debates with Harrison's findings.

Table 5.4 gives the total figures for men and women. They show that women's contributions reached a peak in 1929-30, with 11,162 lines of debate or 4% of the total. No other session comes anywhere close to this number of lines, although the contribution of 5286 lines in 1934-5 was close in terms of percentage (3.9%).

Session	Total lines	Women	Men	% Women
1920	244,017	0	244,017	0.0%
1921	141,379	66	141,313	0.0%
1922	90,061	150	89,911	0.2%
1923	207,505	379	207,126	0.2%
1924	110,953	780	110,173	0.7%
1925	193,814	1706	192,108	0.9%
1926	236,106	1948	234,158	0.8%
1927	205,883	3772	202,111	1.9%
1928	157,607	3473	154,134	2.3%
1928-29	13,590	0	13,590	0.0%
1929-30	290,264	11162	279,102	4.0%

¹⁸ Coverage was selective initially but soon became routine for each standing committee.

¹⁹ Harrison, 'Women in a men's house', p630 footnote. Harrison's methodology, also used here, is as follows: women MPs' debating lines have been directly counted. Equivalent data for men is obtained by deducting the women's figures from an estimate of the total number of total debating lines each session. This estimate is reached by multiplying the number of columns for the session by 60 (the number of lines per column) and deducting from that figure 929 lines per 100 columns to allow for lines used for purposes other than reporting debate.

Session	Total lines	Women	Men	% Women
1930-31	304,361	4956	299,405	1.7%
1931-32	106,390	1755	104,635	1.7%
1932-33	126,166	261	125,905	0.2%
1933-34	178,702	3840	174,862	2.2%
1934-35	142,495	5286	137,209	3.9%
1935-36	147,262	3454	143,808	2.4%
1936-37	166,836	2763	164,073	1.7%
1937-38	154,463	4049	150,414	2.7%
1938-39	173,023	4057	168,966	2.4%
1944-45	45,842	567	45,275	1.3%

Table 5.4: Standing Committees: mens' and women's contributions to debate

Session	Men Attendance	Women Attendance	Lines Per Man	Lines Per Woman
1926	4628	21	50.6	92.8
1927	3251	30	62.2	125.7
1928	2670	58	57.7	59.9
1928-29	427	8	31.8	0.0
1929-30	4990	168	55.9	66.4
1930-31	6289	156	47.6	31.8
1931-32	2285	106	45.8	16.6
1932-33	2565	72	49.1	3.6
1933-34	3411	162	51.3	23.7
1934-35	2627	123	52.2	43.0
1935-36	3425	74	42.0	46.7
1936-37	3214	79	51.0	35.0
1937-38	3477	99	43.3	40.9
1938-39	3268	96	51.7	42.3
1944-45	946	20	47.9	28.4

Table 5.5: Standing Committees: mens' and women's average lines contributed per attendance

The lines spoken by women and men have been compared to attendances from 1926 onwards, when this data becomes available (Table 5.5). They show the men's contribution staying reasonably constant, hovering around 50 lines per attendance, but the women's fluctuating wildly – soaring far higher than the men's in 1926 and 1927, yet far lower through 1930-31 to 1933-34. The small number of women MPs means that one or two women who spoke a great deal, such as Susan Lawrence in 1926 and 1927, skew the statistics. The contribution of women MPs as individuals therefore needs to be considered.

Which individual women MPs were making contributions, and from which political party?

Table 5.6 lists the individual line counts for each woman MP, and also gives their party affiliation. These figures show that, at 18,933 lines, Susan Lawrence contributed most of all women MPs to standing committees by a long way. Lawrence's figures are partly affected by the period she was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health; in this role she contributed 4,844 lines on the Housing Bill in 1929/30 alone. However, she also contributed heavily in the periods she was not in government, contributing some 1,669 lines on just one bill (Merchandise Marks) in 1926, and 3,524 lines on five bills in 1927. Lawrence had a good command of detail,²⁰ and the clause-by-clause nature of standing committee work appears to have been well suited to this strength.

Woman MP	Party	Total Lines
Lawrence	Lab	18,933
Atholl	Con	8,078
Wilkinson	Lab	7,387
Rathbone	Ind	4,479
Astor	Con	4,295
Horsbrugh	Con	3,931
Tate	Con	1,839
Ward I	Con	1,261
Shaw	Con	807
Hardie	Lab	393
Cazalet	Con	293
Davidson	Con	282
Copeland	Con	275
Lloyd George	Lib	268
Philipson	Con	235
Bondfield	Lab	222
Wintringham	Lib	221
Lee	Lab	193
Graves	Con	150
Jewson	Lab	95
Picton-Turbervill	Lab	76
Runge	Con	75
Wright	Con	64
Ward S	Con	40

²⁰ 'Lawrence was a ministerial success; her command of detail secured her authority both in her department and at the dispatch box.' David Howell, 'Lawrence, (Arabella) Susan (1871–1947)', *ODNB*.

Woman MP	Party	Total Lines
Manning	Lab	29
Summerskill	Lab	24

Table 5.6: Standing Committees: total contribution of individual women MPs

The Duchess of Atholl, in second place, contributed less than half the amount of Lawrence, over a considerably longer Parliamentary career, but still a very substantial 8,078 lines. These contributions were spread over a wide variety of bills but nearly all were made on the Scottish Standing Committee. For many years Atholl was the only Scottish woman MP, and it is possible that she felt obliged to contribute more on bills affecting Scotland.

With 7,387 lines, Ellen Wilkinson was not far behind Atholl. Her contributions were influenced by a period as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lawrence at the Ministry of Health from 1929-1931, and also by a private members' bill she introduced (Hire Purchase in 1937-38). After Wilkinson there is a substantial drop to Eleanor Rathbone at 4,479 lines. Lawrence and Wilkinson are largely responsible for Labour women MPs contributing just over half the lines spoken by women in this period. Eleanor Rathbone alone gives the Independent total, while the poor total of 489 for the Liberals represent the contributions of the two Liberal women MPs (Wintringham and Megan Lloyd George).

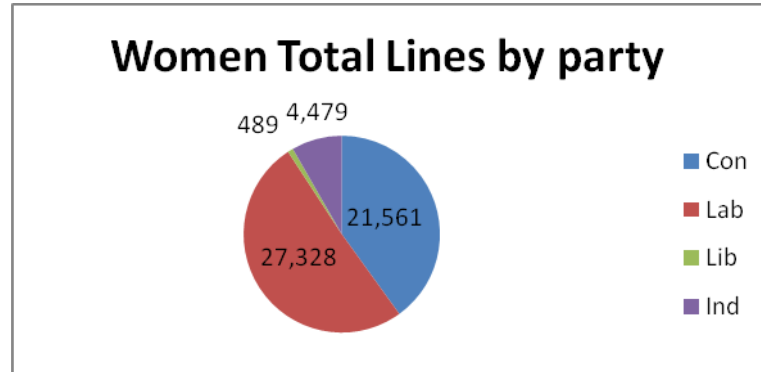


Figure 5.3: Standing Committees: women's contributions by political party

On what subjects did women MPs contribute?

Table 5.7 gives a complete list of the bills on which women MPs spoke.

Session	Women MP	Lines	Standing Committee (A, B, C, D or Scottish) & Bill	Govt/Private Members Bill
1921	Astor	66	D Guardianship of Infants	PMB
1922	Wintringham	10	B School Teachers (Superannuation)	Govt
1922	Wintringham	140	D Criminal Law Amendment	Govt

Session	Women MP	Lines	Standing Committee (A, B, C, D or Scottish) & Bill	Govt/Private Members Bill
1923	Astor	364	C Intoxicating Liquors (Sale to Persons Under 18)	PMB
1923	Wintringham	15	B Universities of Oxford & Cambridge	Govt
1924	Atholl	60	A Rent Restrictions	PMB
1924	Atholl	84	A Representation of the People Act (Amendment)	PMB
1924	Atholl	49	C Summer Time	Govt
1924	Atholl	39	Sc Education (Scotland) (Superannuation)	Govt
1924	Atholl	187	Sc Public Health (Scotland) Amendment	Govt
1924	Philipson	3	A Rent Restrictions	PMB
1924	Jewson	95	A Representation of the People Act (Amendment)	PMB
1924	Lawrence	207	A Representation of the People Act (Amendment)	PMB
1924	Wintringham	17	A Representation of the People Act (Amendment)	PMB
1924	Wintringham	39	B Agricultural Wages	Govt
1925	Astor	129	A Guardianship of Infants	Govt
1925	Astor	8	D Unemployment Insurance	Govt
1925	Philipson	38	C Theatrical Employers' Registration	PMB
1925	Philipson	12	C Public Health	PMB
1925	Wilkinson	1519	D Unemployment Insurance	Govt
1926	Astor	137	A Adoption of Children	PMB
1926	Philipson	89	A Adoption of Children	PMB
1926	Wilkinson	53	A Adoption of Children	PMB
1926	Lawrence	1669	B Merchandise Marks (Imported Goods)	Govt
1927	Lawrence	20	A Auctions (Bidding Agreements)	PMB
1927	Lawrence	620	A Moneylenders	PMB
1927	Lawrence	132	A Seditious & Blasphemous Teaching to Children	PMB
1927	Astor	223	A Nursing Homes (Registration)	PMB
1927	Lawrence	157	A Nursing Homes (Registration)	PMB
1927	Philipson	25	A Nursing Homes (Registration)	PMB
1927	Lawrence	2595	D Audit (Local Authorities)	Govt
1928	Bondfield	222	A Shops (Hours of Closing)	PMB
1928	Philipson	68	A Shops (Hours of Closing)	PMB
1928	Wilkinson	557	A Shops (Hours of Closing)	PMB

Session	Women MP	Lines	Standing Committee (A, B, C, D or Scottish) & Bill	Govt/Private Members Bill
1928	Lawrence	1965	A Companies	Govt
1928	Lawrence	6	A Rubber Industry	PMB
1928	Lawrence	655	C Local Authorities (Emergency Provisions)	Govt
1929-30	Wilkinson	11	A Mental Treatment	Govt
1929-30	Picton-Turbervill	29	A Mental Treatment	Govt
1929-30	Lawrence	2330	A Mental Treatment	Govt
1929-30	Lloyd George	85	A Housing	Govt
1929-30	Wilkinson	24	A Housing	Govt
1929-30	Rathbone	1181	A Housing	Govt
1929-30	Lawrence	4844	A Housing	Govt
1929-30	Atholl	880	B Canal Boats	PMB
1929-30	Lawrence	277	B Canal Boats	PMB
1929-30	Lawrence	136	B Local Authorities (Enabling)	PMB
1929-30	Lawrence	140	B Playing Fields (Exemption from Ratings)	PMB
1929-30	Atholl	264	Sc Highlands and Islands (Medical Service) Additional Grant	Govt
1929-30	Atholl	183	Sc Illegitimate Children	PMB
1929-30	Atholl	504	Sc Housing (Scotland)	Govt
1929-30	Lee	143	Sc Housing (Scotland)	Govt
1929-30	Astor	42	Sc Adoption of Children (Scotland)	PMB
1929-30	Atholl	50	Sc Adoption of Children (Scotland)	PMB
1929-30	Rathbone	39	Sc Adoption of Children (Scotland)	PMB
1930-31	Lee	50	Sc Small Landholders & Agricultural Holdings (Scotland)	Govt
1930-31	Atholl	906	Sc Small Landholders & Agricultural Holdings (Scotland)	Govt
1930-31	Atholl	235	Sc Probation of Offenders (Scotland)	Govt
1930-31	Lloyd George	176	B Agricultural Land (Utilisation)	Govt
1930-31	Manning	29	C Consumers Council	Govt
1930-31	Lawrence	237	A Slaughter of Animals	PMB
1930-31	Rathbone	307	D Town & Country Planning	Govt
1930-31	Wilkinson	26	D Town & Country Planning	Govt
1930-31	Picton-Turbervill	47	D Town & Country Planning	Govt
1930-31	Lawrence	2943	D Town & Country Planning	Govt
1931-32	Astor	876	B Children & Young Persons	Govt
1931-32	Copeland	122	B Children & Young Persons	Govt

Session	Women MP	Lines	Standing Committee (A, B, C, D or Scottish) & Bill	Govt/Private Members Bill
1931-32	Graves	150	B Children & Young Persons	Govt
1931-32	Horsbrugh	146	B Children & Young Persons	Govt
1931-32	Runge	42	B Children & Young Persons	Govt
1931-32	Shaw	66	B Children & Young Persons	Govt
1931-32	Tate	353	B Children & Young Persons	Govt
1932-33	Tate	93	A Road & Rail Traffic	Govt
1932-33	Runge	33	B Dog Racing (Local Option)	PMB
1932-33	Horsbrugh	47	B Dog Racing (Local Option)	PMB
1932-33	Copeland	15	B Solicitors	PMB
1932-33	Copeland	41	B Slaughter of Animals	PMB
1932-33	Copeland	32	B Service of Process (Justices)	Govt
1933-34	Rathbone	354	A Powers of Disinheritance/Inheritance (Family Provision)	PMB
1933-34	Rathbone	1308	A Incitement to Disaffection	Govt
1933-34	Astor	255	B Licensing (Standardisation of Hours)	PMB
1933-34	Ward I	51	C British Hydrocarbon Oils Production	Govt
1933-34	Ward I	69	C Mines (Welfare Facilities)	Govt
1933-34	Ward I	17	C Electricity (Supply)	PMB
1933-34	Tate	588	C Road Traffic	Govt
1933-34	Ward S	40	C Road Traffic	Govt
1933-34	Copeland	13	D Water Supplies (Exceptional Shortage Orders)	Govt
1933-34	Astor	562	D Shops	Govt
1933-34	Atholl	280	D Shops	Govt
1933-34	Copeland	52	D Shops	Govt
1933-34	Tate	37	D Shops	Govt
1933-34	Astor	18	D Betting & Lotteries	PMB
1933-34	Horsbrugh	22	Sc Registration of Births Deaths & Marriages (Scotland) Amendment	PMB
1933-34	Horsbrugh	100	Sc Poor Law (Scotland)	Govt
1933-34	Shaw	74	Sc Poor Law (Scotland)	Govt
1934-35	Cazalet	136	A Housing	Govt
1934-35	Ward I	641	A Housing	Govt
1934-35	Atholl	3070	Sc Housing (Scotland)	Govt
1934-35	Horsbrugh	772	Sc Housing (Scotland)	Govt
1934-35	Shaw	667	Sc Housing (Scotland)	Govt
1935-36	Horsbrugh	91	A Employment of Women & Young Persons	Govt
1935-36	Lloyd George	7	A Employment of Women & Young	Govt

Session	Women MP	Lines	Standing Committee (A, B, C, D or Scottish) & Bill	Govt/Private Members Bill
			Persons	
1935-36	Rathbone	104	A Employment of Women & Young Persons	Govt
1935-36	Ward I	7	A Employment of Women & Young Persons	Govt
1935-36	Wilkinson	575	A Employment of Women & Young Persons	Govt
1935-36	Atholl	409	A Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture)	Govt
1935-36	Tate	55	A Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture)	Govt
1935-36	Astor	400	A Education	Govt
1935-36	Atholl	382	A Education	Govt
1935-36	Cazalet	157	A Education	Govt
1935-36	Rathbone	160	A Education	Govt
1935-36	Rathbone	472	C Midwives	Govt
1935-36	Tate	26	C Midwives	Govt
1935-36	Wilkinson	97	C Midwives	Govt
1935-36	Atholl	396	Sc Education (Scotland)	Govt
1935-36	Horsbrugh	116	Sc Education (Scotland)	Govt
1936-37	Tate	266	A Marriage	Govt
1936-37	Ward I	138	A Annual Holiday	Govt
1936-37	Tate	50	A Road Traffic	Govt
1936-37	Tate	56	A Inheritance (Family Provision)	Govt
1936-37	Rathbone	271	A Inheritance (Family Provision)	Govt
1936-37	Ward I	95	A Summary Procedure (Matrimonial & Other Matters)	Govt
1936-37	Astor	1215	B Factories	Govt
1936-37	Horsbrugh	346	B Factories	Govt
1936-37	Tate	5	D Widows, Orphans & Old Age Contributory Pensions (Voluntary Contributors)	Govt
1936-37	Atholl	100	Sc Sheep Stocks Valuation (Scotland)	PMB
1936-37	Horsbrugh	213	Sc Methylated Spirits (Scotland)	Govt
1936-37	Horsbrugh	8	Sc Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland)	Govt
1937-38	Wilkinson	357	A Cinematograph Films	Govt
1937-38	Rathbone	283	B Inheritance (Family Provision)	PMB
1937-38	Ward I	30	B Inheritance (Family Provision)	PMB
1937-38	Wilkinson	2633	B Hire-Purchase	PMB

Session	Women MP	Lines	Standing Committee (A, B, C, D or Scottish) & Bill	Govt/Private Members Bill
1937-38	Hardie	36	B Hire-Purchase	PMB
1937-38	Davidson	13	C Sea Fish Industry	Govt
1937-38	Hardie	33	Sc Housing (Agricultural Population) (Scotland)	Govt
1937-38	Horsbrugh	625	Sc Divorce & Nullity of Marriage (Scotland)	PMB
1937-38	Horsbrugh	39	Sc Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland)	PMB
1938-39	Davidson	269	A Criminal Justice	Govt
1938-39	Hardie	244	A Criminal Justice	Govt
1938-39	Tate	310	A Criminal Justice	Govt
1938-39	Ward I	213	A Criminal Justice	Govt
1938-39	Horsbrugh	43	A Building Societies	Govt
1938-39	Wilkinson	1535	A Building Societies	Govt
1938-39	Horsbrugh	1363	C Adoption of Children (Regulation)	PMB
1938-39	Hardie	80	Sc Reorganisation of Offices (Scotland)	Govt
1944-45	Horsbrugh	355	A Water	Govt
1944-45	Summerskill	24	A Water	Govt
1944-45	Wright	64	A Water	Govt
1944-45	Hardie	124	Sc Education (Scotland)	Govt

Table 5.7: Standing Committees: complete list of women's contributions

These bills have been categorised using the same methodology as Brian Harrison for debates in the Commons chamber, to enable comparison. Harrison categorised the subjects on which women spoke into eight policy areas:

- Welfare (education, public health, housing, unemployment, labour relations)
- Foreign and defence policy
- Questions specially affecting women (equal pay, family allowances, family law reform, equal franchise and women's war service, employment, rights and status)
- Economic and commercial questions
- Second World War topics
- Moral issues (drink, sex morality, betting, religious issues)
- Legal and constitutional questions
- Libertarian and humanitarian issues

The percentages for each area for debates in the Commons chamber and for standing committee debates are illustrated in Figures 5.4 and 5.5 below.

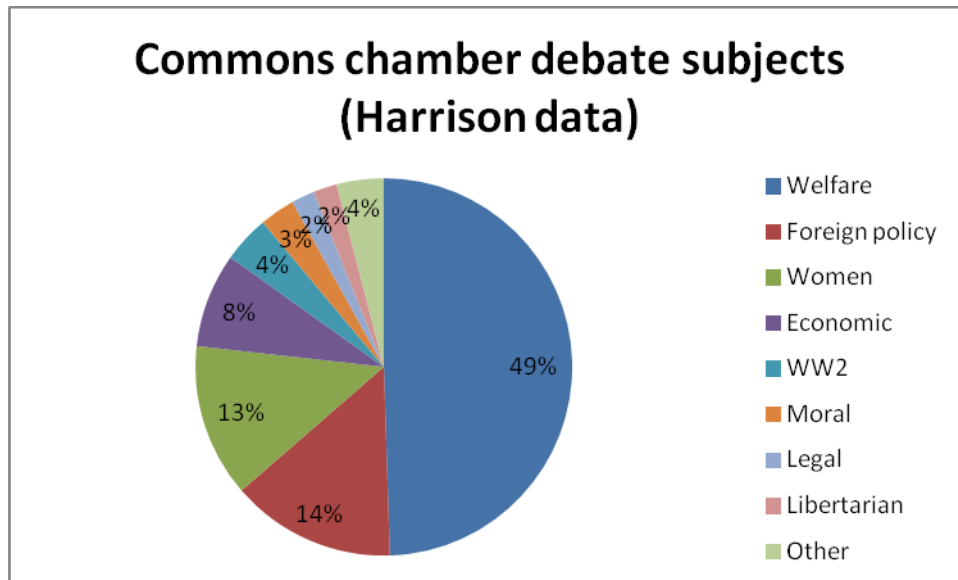


Figure 5.4: Subjects of debate in the Commons chamber (Harrison data)

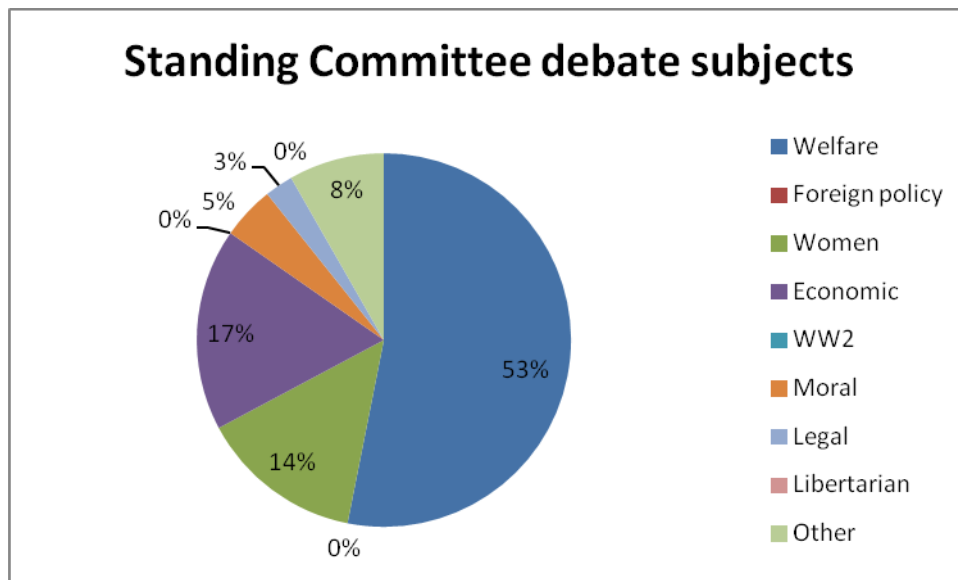


Figure 5.5: Subjects of debate in standing committees

The main difference is the absence of any debate in standing committees for three of Harrison's categories: foreign policy, Second World War, and libertarian issues. This is accounted for firstly, by the fact that these areas were less likely to be the subject of legislation so would not come before standing committees, and, secondly, by the fact that there were no standing committees convened during the wartime sessions 1939/40-1943/44 when these issues featured heavily in the chamber.

Harrison breaks down the broad 'Welfare' area into sub-categories: Benefits, Unemployment and Industry, Education, Public Health, Housing, and Industrial Relations. Figures 5.6 and 5.7

compare these results with a similar analysis for the standing committee debates. The differences are largely due to the nature of standing committees as a legislative stage; they were less likely to consider industrial relations, for example. Benefits feature heavily in the chamber, where principles were discussed, but perhaps surprisingly not in standing committees. By contrast, Housing was discussed at length in standing committees. There were some major bills on Housing in this period which explains why that is the largest Welfare category.

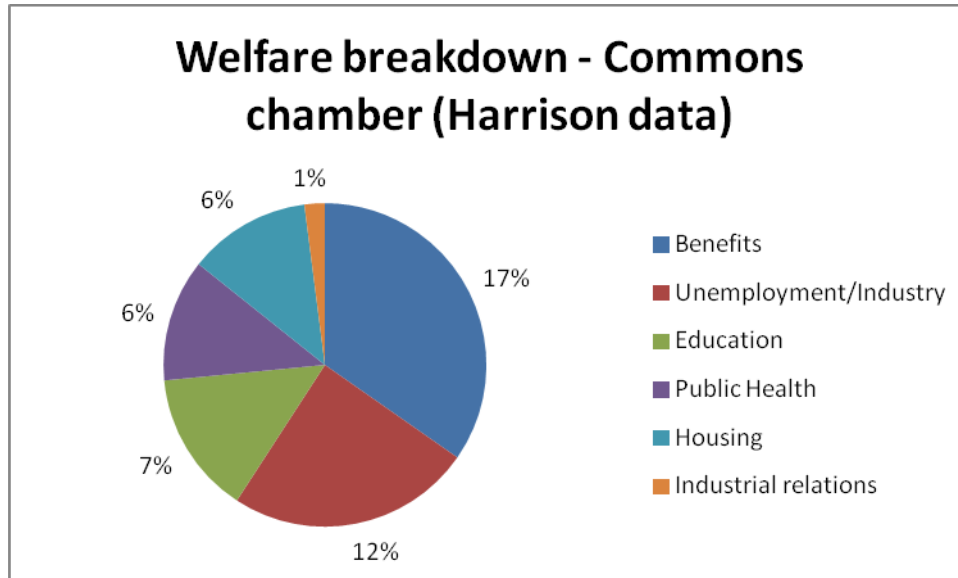


Figure 5.6: Subjects of debate in the chamber (Harrison data): welfare breakdown

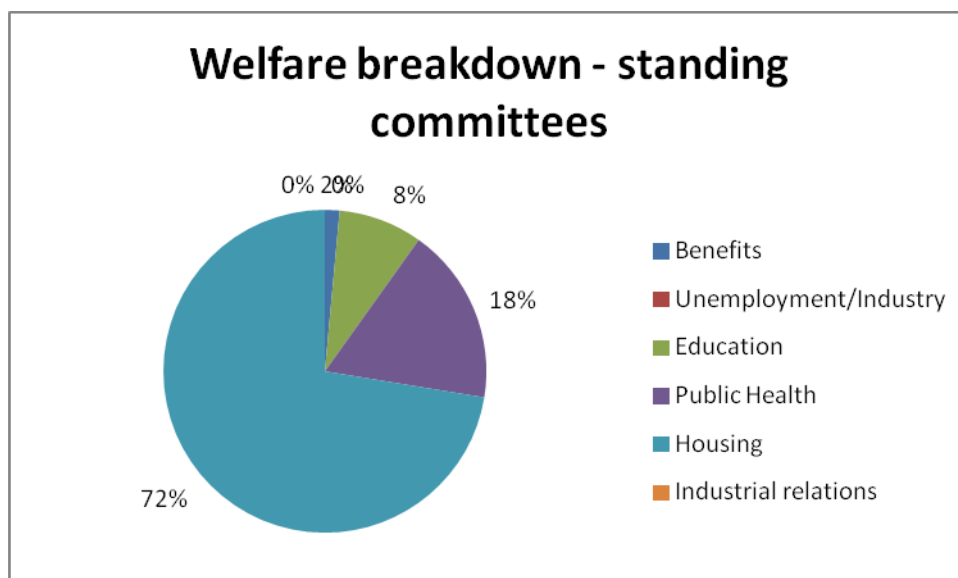


Figure 5.7: Subjects of debate in standing committees: welfare breakdown

Setting statistics aside and looking at what was said, consideration of the contribution of women MPs to standing committees brings out a number of themes. Women MPs often spoke about women's issues, subjects of personal importance to them, and sometimes gave a 'women's' perspective even when the policy area was not obviously about women. However they also contributed heavily in areas with no apparent women's perspective, often disagreeing with each other. Hostility was repeatedly shown to the women MPs by some men. These themes are explored below.

Women MPs on women's issues

This period saw some bills of obvious relevance to women, in which women MPs were prominent in debate. In the 1920s this included lengthy Equal Franchise bill standing committee debates in 1924, where Atholl, Jewson, Lawrence and contributed heavily,²¹ and the Nursing Homes bill 1927, at which Astor, Lawrence and Philipson all spoke.²² In the 1930s, women were out in force again for the Employment of Women and Young Persons Bill 1935-36, the Education Bill 1935-36 and Midwives Bill 1935-36. Horsbrugh clearly took a lead on the Adoption of Children Bill 1938-39, taking a keen interest having previously been chair of a departmental committee on adoption societies and agencies in 1936.²³

Sometimes even when women MPs did not speak much, they played an important role in introducing and amending clauses. Mabel Philipson only spoke 89 lines on the Adoption Bill 1926, but made an amendment accepted by the Government on equality of adopted and natural children.²⁴ Four women were on the Criminal Justice Bill standing committee in 1938-39, in which Irene Ward and Mavis Tate both introduced new clauses, and Agnes Hardie an amendment.²⁵ Perhaps the biggest contribution by women MPs to a bill on a women's issue was on the Children and Young Persons Bill 1931-32. This standing committee included Astor,

²¹ See Chapter 4 for more detail.

²² There was also a Select Committee on nursing homes, see Chapter 6.

²³ Jenny Keating, *A child for keeps: the history of adoption in England, 1918-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²⁴ SC Deb (A) 16 Mar 1926 cc127-8.

²⁵ SC Deb (A) 20 Apr 1939 cc778-780, 777-8, 787-8.

Copeland, Graves, Horsbrugh, Runge, Shaw and Tate. All contributed, speaking and putting forward amendments.²⁶

Women MPs bringing out the women's perspective

It is apparent from an early point that women MPs were prime movers in bringing forward a women's perspective on issues where this otherwise might have been overlooked. For example, on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge Bill 1923, Mrs Wintringham introduced an amendment to include a woman as an Oxford commissioner.²⁷ This was passed. Wintringham also brought up women in discussion on the Agricultural Wages Bill 1924²⁸, arguing that the definition of a worker should include both men and women, and that women should be represented on local committees. The need to ensure adequate representation of women in organisations of many types is a recurring theme throughout this period. Picton-Turbervill spoke on the need to have women members on visiting committees in debates on the Mental Treatment Bill 1929-30.²⁹ Horsbrugh brought up training for women in the Poor Law (Scotland) Bill 1933-34.³⁰

Perhaps the most interesting example, however, is the Duchess of Atholl. Atholl is not known for her sympathy for women's issues, yet in her contributions to standing committee debates she repeatedly brought up women's angles. For example, on the Scottish Education Superannuation Bill 1924 she spoke of strain on the health of women teachers.³¹ On the Illegitimate Children (Scottish) Bill 1929-30 she spoke on the need for taking into consideration the means of both parents when setting the aliment (allowance) to be paid for an illegitimate child, and drew attention to the heavy burden that mothers of such children could face in funeral expenses if these were not included.³² She also spoke in favour of adoption by unmarried people, such as two women friends or sisters, on the Adoption Bill.³³ Most of these

²⁶ SC Deb (B) 25 Feb – 28 Apr 1932 cc1059-1608.

²⁷ SC Deb (B) 11 Jul 1923 c685.

²⁸ SC Deb (B) 24 Jul 1924 c1429.

²⁹ SC Deb (A) 20 Mar 1930 c396.

³⁰ SC Deb (Sc) 6 Jun 1934 cc1004-5.

³¹ SC Deb (Sc) 22 May 1924 c2101.

³² SC Deb (Sc) 10 Dec 1929 cc54, 61-2.

³³ SC Deb (Sc) 8 Jul 1930 c1235.

contributions came in Scottish Standing Committee, reflecting her status for a long period as the only woman MP in Scotland.

However she also contributed in bills which were not exclusively Scottish. In the debates on the Unemployment Insurance Bill 1935-36, Atholl moved an amendment on milking cows, remarking this was, 'a form of part-time employment very common among women.'³⁴ Atholl was especially prominent in the debate on the Canal Boats Bill 1929-30, when a new clause was proposed to ban women from employment on canal boats. Susan Lawrence objected on the grounds that, 'They work the boats and make as good a job of it as a master or man'. Patrick Hannon (Conservative) criticised Atholl for not supporting the clause, asking 'Is it going to be said that a lady who is so prominently identified with every movement in this country for the improvement and welfare of the people, is going to resist a proposal which seeks to prevent women being employed in one of the most objectionable occupations that anybody could conceive?' To which Atholl replied, 'I feel it is not possible to say that women must not do this work... After all, it is women who usually have to deal with unpleasant inhabitants of that kind on shore, and I should think they are quite as competent to deal with that particular difficulty as men.'³⁵

Women MPs with a personal interest

The enthusiasm and passion of women MPs comes through when considering bills on subjects of interest to them. Astor spoke on her own Intoxicating Liquors Bill 1923,³⁶ and again on the Licensing Bill 1933-34. She clashed with fellow Conservative MP Henry Raikes, threatening to fight him at a by-election, because, 'I believe that I know more about what women want and what working women need than the hon Gentleman opposite.'³⁷

Eleanor Rathbone's expertise on family allowances is well known, and she spoke on standing committees on her Powers of Disinheritance Bill 1933-34 and Inheritance (Family Provisions) Bill 1936-37.³⁸ The former actress Mabel Philipson clearly had a good knowledge of the area of the Theatrical Employers Registration Bill 1925, and spoke from personal experience about

³⁴ SC Deb (A) 12 Mar 1936 c34.

³⁵ SC Deb (B) 18 Mar 1930 cc2094-2127.

³⁶ SC Deb (C) 10 Apr 1923 cc907-910.

³⁷ SC Deb (B) 8 Mar 1934 cc999-1002.

³⁸ SC Deb (A) 8 Mar 1934 cc147-151; SC Deb (A) 8 Apr 1937 cc562-6.

absconding employers.³⁹ Sometimes women MPs showed a clear interest in a subject which was perhaps not so obvious: Mavis Tate, better known for her interest in aviation, showed a great passion for road safety in the Road Traffic Bill 1933-34, for example proposing a clause preventing more than two cyclists from riding abreast.⁴⁰

Women MPs on general subjects

By far the greatest individual contributor to standing committee debates was Susan Lawrence.⁴¹ In the period before she was a minister she made very substantial contributions in areas with no gender relevance. This can be seen in the debates on the Merchandise Marks Bill 1926, Moneylenders Bill 1927, Companies Bill 1928⁴², and Audit (Local Authorities) Bill 1927, where she spoke more than two thousand lines, and, along with George Lansbury, was prominent, passionate, and involved.⁴³ After the General Election 1929, Lawrence came into her own as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health. She contributed many thousands of detailed technical lines of debate on the Mental Treatment Bill, Housing (no 2) Bill and others in 1929-30.⁴⁴ At one point during the Housing Bill debates she replaced the Minister for a few days when he was absent, having been injured in an accident. The next session, Lawrence was again prominent at her post, especially on the Town and Country Bill 1930-31.⁴⁵

Atholl also made substantial contributions to issues on which she made no gender-related points, such as the Small Landholders and Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) bill 1930-31 and the Housing (Scotland) bill 1934-35.⁴⁶ Wilkinson made an enormous contribution on the Hire

³⁹ SC Deb (C) 1 Apr 1925 cc78-9.

⁴⁰ SC Deb (C) 7 Jun 1934 cc2097-2104.

⁴¹ Standing Committee Hansard twice mistakenly refers to her as 'Mr Lawrence'. This does not happen to any other woman MP. SC Dec (B) 15 Jun – 29 Jul 1927 c1110 and c1374.

⁴² SC Deb (B) 15 Jun – 29 Jul 1927 cc579-1486; SC Deb (A) 31 Mar – 19 May 1927 cc119-492; SC (B) 6 Mar – 7 Jun 1928 cc895-1882.

⁴³ SC Deb (D) 21 Jun – 13 Jul 1927 cc1483-1824.

⁴⁴ SC Deb (A) 25 Feb – 3 Apr 1930 cc119-576; 1 May – 1 Jul 1930 cc595-1326.

⁴⁵ SC Deb (D) 28 Apr – 16 Jul 1931 cc607-1456.

⁴⁶ SC Deb (Sc) 26 Nov 1930 cc1475-2014, SC Deb (A) 5 Mar – 30 May 1935 cc95-1302.

Purchase bill 1937-38, and again on the Building Societies (no 2) bill 1938-39.⁴⁷ She too had ministerial responsibilities in certain periods. There was a rebuke during the Housing (No 2) Bill 1929-30 when Dr Arthur Davies (Conservative) referred to her with her full ministerial title; 'The hon Lady who is the Parliamentary private secretary to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health comes here about three quarters of an hour late, yawning...'⁴⁸

Eleanor Rathbone, who never had any ministerial responsibilities, made substantial contributions on the Incitement to Disaffection Bill 1933-34. At one point she disagreed that the armed forces could be classified separately, on the grounds that it was dangerous to limit freedom of expression; her argument surprised and shocked the Attorney-General, who referred to her as 'an advocate of unlicensed propaganda and in favour of everything, good or evil.' At one point he said, 'The hon Lady has the privilege of her sex of being illogical.' Rathbone responded, 'I was only being severely logical.'⁴⁹

Disagreements between women MPs

Any idea that women MPs would agree and band together is repeatedly confounded in standing committee debates. Nancy Astor frequently clashed with fellow Conservatives, women and men. During debates on the Children and Young Persons Bill 1931-32, with a number of women MPs present, there was a discussion on women justices, in which Astor moved an amendment to have at least one woman on the panel in all juvenile courts. Major Thomas Jesson (Conservative) opposed, saying that women on the bench were usually not mothers but spinsters, and 'I find in my experience that many of these spinsters possess what I might call a frozen spine.' Some women MPs supported Astor (including Shaw, who was a JP, and a mother), but two women voted against, Graves and Runge. Graves said, 'I would like to point out that the whole element of the Sex Equality Act of years ago was to put men and women on the same footing with regard to opportunity, irrespective of sex, that the thing will go by merit, and the very protection which the Noble Lady would have us afforded is an indication of our weakness, which most of us, I think, would rather be without.' Graves's argument was echoed by a number of the men including Oliver Stanley (Conservative), who referred to the 'poor unfortunate man, whose case for equality has never yet been granted.'

⁴⁷ SC Deb (B) 10 Feb – 1 Mar 1938 cc1087-1302; SC Deb (A) 6 Jun – 6 Jul 1939 cc975-1338.

⁴⁸ SC Deb (A) 15 May 1930 c778. Wilkinson replied, 'I did rise in my seat, but I am so small that no doubt the hon and gallant Member did not notice the fact.'

⁴⁹ SC Deb (A) 30 May 1934 c328.

And Sir Gervais Rentoul (Conservative): 'We are surely living in days when we have got beyond these invidious distinctions'. Several men were, in contrast, sympathetic. Thomas Magnay (National Liberal) remarked that, 'It must be a comfort to a child to see a woman on the bench, and the smug complacency with which men have spoken for their sex this morning is to me, as a new Member, amazing.'⁵⁰

During the Education Bill 1935-36, Astor was very strong on the need to raise the school leaving age and took issue with a remark by her fellow Conservative Atholl about the need for small fingers to work some machinery. Astor spoke of Members giving 'an "Up the chimneys and down the mines" speech', saying, 'I never believed I would hear in this year of grace a speech from any Member of the House of Commons in the spirit in which the Noble Lady spoke.' Astor was not the only one who took exception to Atholl's speech: James Chuter Ede (Labour) remarked that, 'Her sex, if not her rank, protects her from one saying what one would have said had such a speech been made by a male Member of the Committee'.⁵¹

Nor was it just Astor who clashed with women of her own party. Labour women Susan Lawrence and Edith Picton-Turbervill disagreed on the Town and Country Bill 1930-31. Isaac Foot moved an amendment to have at least two women on each planning committee, by request of a women's organisation;⁵² this provoked a stock reaction by Lieut-Col Francis Fremantle (Conservative): 'we want to give every possible latitude to women [Interruption] – equality to women... ', therefore, 'I claim there should be equality for men as well as for women.' Picton-Turbervill then commented on the unlikelihood that women would outnumber men. But Lawrence took a different view: that although women might require representation on issues such as maternity and child welfare, education and mental treatment, they had no intrinsic interest or distinctive contribution to make to town planning. So this, she concluded, was 'a silly Amendment.' Major Anthony Muirhead (Conservative) then observed that from this example, 'if you co-opt two women on the same committee and they start by taking contrary views, they cancel each other out and their presence, therefore, is redundant.' The amendment was withdrawn.⁵³

⁵⁰ SC Deb (B) 25 Feb 1932 cc1074-1088.

⁵¹ SC Deb (A) 24 Mar 1936 cc448-452.

⁵² The organisation is not named.

⁵³ SC Deb (D) 7 May 1931 cc746-754.

Women MPs not contributing where they might be expected to

Just because a woman MP was on a standing committee dealing with a 'women's issue' did not mean they necessarily contributed to the debate. For example Wilkinson did not contribute on the Midwives Bill 1926, nor did any women MPs speak on the Midwives Bill 1927 in the Scottish Standing Committee. Little was said by women on the Widows, Orphans and Old Age Pensions Bill 1936-37. Indeed not much was heard from women at all in the sessions of 1932-33 or 1934-35. Sometimes where they did speak, they seemed shy about it. Ida Copeland piped up during debates on the Solicitors Bill 1932-33, saying, 'I apologise to the committee for venturing to ask one question on this subject.'⁵⁴ During the Sea Fish Bill 1937-38, Viscountess Davidson ventured, 'May I dare open my mouth among so many experts?'⁵⁵ However both Copeland and Davidson were fairly new MPs at the time.⁵⁶

Special treatment for the ladies

It is not surprising that some women may have hesitated to speak out because there are many examples of male MPs referring to their women counterparts; sometimes to express a courteous attitude to lady Members, at other times unashamedly hostile. The extent to which male MPs may have adjusted or tempered what they said because they were debating with a woman MP is interesting to consider. Ellen Wilkinson made a substantial contribution to debates on the Unemployment Insurance Bill 1925, including highlighting women textile workers who could not be supposed to be dependant on a husband's income. While she was talking, there was an interruption by George Buchanan (Labour). 'Shut up!' (Order!) He was rebuked, 'The hon Member is talking to a lady, and he is supposed to be a gentleman.'⁵⁷

Rathbone was criticised by Sir Kingsley Wood (Conservative) for not attending much of the debate on the Town and Country Bill 1930-31. He said that members who could not attend should not sit on Committees. Rathbone tried to protest, but Wood retorted, 'I never let a lady have the last word with me if I can help it.'⁵⁸ At one point during the Housing (Scotland) Bill

⁵⁴ SC Deb (B) 30 Mar 1933 c984.

⁵⁵ SC Deb (C) 9 Dec 1937 c155.

⁵⁶ Copeland was elected in 1931 but did not make her maiden speech until May 1932. Davidson was elected in a by-election in 1937.

⁵⁷ SC Deb (D) 14 Jul 1925 c519

⁵⁸ SC Deb (D) 2 Jul 1931 c1272.

1934-35, the Chairman remarked (in the absence) of the Duchess of Atholl, 'I think that if the Noble Lady had been a gentleman, I should not have allowed her to develop that subject as much as she did.'⁵⁹

During her short time as an MP, Leah Manning sat on the Consumer Council Bill 1930-31. The impression that she had to prove herself as a woman is given at one point when Captain Harry Crookshank (Conservative) remarked about food rationing, 'I was one of the people who, because they were in uniform, did not have to bother with that sort of thing.'

Manning: 'I also was in uniform.'

Crookshank: 'My respect for the hon Lady goes up by leaps and bounds.'⁶⁰

The debate included an exchange over fixing the price of a skirt which veered into some jossing over skirt lengths. Outright sexist opinions sometimes came through. During the Marriage Bill 1936-37, Patrick Spens (Conservative) referred to 'the present scandal in connection with the divorce law that, as the result of granting to women the right to divorce their husbands solely on account of adultery, certain women have abused that right by using it in order to get the marriage dissolved when there is nothing but incompatibility of temperament.' Mavis Tate jumped up to object: 'It is not only women. I must protest.'⁶¹

Several times Labour MPs took exception to MPs whom they perceived to be upper-class presuming knowledge of working people, or of areas of the country; this might happen to male MPs too, but had an extra edge with a woman MP such as Astor. During debate on the Unemployment Insurance Bill 1925, Astor interrupted Joseph Batey (Labour), who said, 'One might well understand that the Noble Lady the Member for the Sutton Division of Plymouth has never felt about these people as we feel about them. She has never come in contact with them.' The exchange continued,

Astor: 'I wish to tell the hon Member that I represent thousands of working men and women, and I resent his remark.'

Batey: 'If you represent thousands of working-men, then God help them!'

⁵⁹ SC Deb (Sc) 12 Mar 1935 c177. The Chairman was Lt-Col Charles Glen MacAndrew (Conservative).

⁶⁰ SC Deb (C) 21 Jul 1931 c1479. It's not clear how Manning, a 'pacifist and internationalist', would have been in uniform. Alison Oram, 'Manning, Dame (Elizabeth) Leah (1886–1977)', *ODNB*.

⁶¹ SC Deb (A) 2 Dec 1936 c11.

Astor: 'I represent them better than the hon Member does.'⁶²

On another occasion, Astor made a major contribution on the Factories Bill 1936-37, at one point moving an amendment to stop women being excluded from some processes connected with lead manufacture. Some women's societies did not favour such discrimination, and had been lobbying the MPs hard on this issue. John Rhys Davies (Labour) referred to 'these organisations in London of dilettante rich women.'

Astor: Oh!

Davies: Let me repeat it if it annoys the Noble Lady.

Astor. ...The women interested in all these questions are far from rich; they are among the hardest working, the most intelligent, and the most industrious women in the country.

Davies: It is strange that we in the trade union movement do not know anything about them.

Astor: You do not know anything about women in the trade union movement.

Davies: Since women have entered Parliament, I have known a great deal more about them than I thought I ever should.⁶³

Astor was not the only target. During the Shop Hours Bill 1928, Joshua Ritson (Labour) was very rude about Mabel Philipson: '...she is only a political importation and does not understand the tremendous anxiety there is in the North in regard to hours of labour...I feel quite sure that there are not miners enough in the hon Lady's constituency [Berwick upon Tweed] to keep the fires on this establishment going for a week.' Ritson also referred to the hon and gallant member for Torquay (Commander Charles Williams, Conservative) asking 'for votes of the flappers at the next election'.⁶⁴

There was a discussion on birching during the Children and Young Persons Bill 1931-32 where David Kirkwood (Labour), father of seven, clashed badly with Florence Horsbrugh. He said, 'Think of the conditions as the Hon Member must know, in her hell of a town-' Horsbrugh

⁶² SC Deb (D) 20 Jul 1925 cc606-7.

⁶³ SC Deb (B) 13 Apr 1937 c1146.

⁶⁴ SC Deb (A) 3 Apr 1928 cc109-110.

protested at this, but the Chairman had not heard the adjective. Astor asked, 'Is it Parliamentary to call a particular town "a hell of a town"?' to which Kirkwood responded, 'Would it be in order if I said that a woman was a hell of a woman?' The Chairman called for order. 'We must all try to keep a little decency in the Committee.'⁶⁵

Sometimes order was not much in evidence. During debate on the Companies Bill 1928, Herbert Looker (Conservative) claimed that Dennis Herbert (also Conservative) had referred to Susan Lawrence as "an old woman from the suburbs". Herbert denied it!⁶⁶ But by far the most disorderly standing committee debate was on the Consumers Council Bill in 1930-31. The lengthy debate on this bill was very bad tempered and disruptive. An idea of the tenor can be obtained from the Hansard index to the debates, which includes the following entries:

Members asleep and not voting..Gross waste of Parliamentary time, alleged accusation of...Members kicking feet on desks...alleged Musical sounds from other end of the room...Newspapers, reading of, by Members...Paper designs, no Rule against making of...Singing by Members...Whistling, will be taken notice of, when heard...⁶⁷

Leah Manning was on this committee, but said little despite a detailed debate on whether the new Consumer's Council should include two women. The opposition was led by Major George Tryon (Conservative), with his amendment that at least two *men* should be on the Council. 'There are cases where women wish to have privileges in addition to equality... I suggest that this proposal should cut both ways.' He also noted that this Committee 'has not itself got two women members on it.' A variety of views were expressed. Major Philip Colfox (Conservative), 'speaking under very great provocation' said that, indeed, there should be two men on the council, but 'There are many people going about dressed in masculine attire who are far from any right to be called men. We have a lot of examples in this present House of Commons.' Cyril Culverwell (Conservative) argued it was an insult to women because it didn't consider them on merit, and Manning should have contempt for it: 'Today women are invading every sphere of national life... There is a danger of this council being monopolised by women... There is a possibility, indeed a likelihood, of the whole of this Council consisting of women'. Unfortunately Manning had evidently not been following the debate, as she then asked why this amendment was being moved. Culverwell poured contempt on her. 'The hon Lady appears

⁶⁵ SC Deb (B) 3 Mar 1932 c1155. The 'hell of a town' was Horsbrugh's constituency, Dundee.

⁶⁶ SC Deb (B) 24 Apr 1928 cc1326-7.

⁶⁷ SC Deb (C) 10 Feb - 30 Jul 1931 index pp24-25.

to take little interest in the discussion...Remarks like that dissipate one's faith and hope in the weaker sex. I wonder why any women at all are returned to this honourable House. My argument is that we should prevent a complete control of this Council by women, that we should put a stop to a matriarchy.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

Standing committees provided a different environment for debate from the Commons chamber. The number of MPs present was much smaller, the nature of discussion much more detailed and often technically very complex. Some women MPs such as Susan Lawrence, Ellen Wilkinson and Florence Horsbrugh, seemed to excel in this. Some, like Astor, did not naturally take to the style but nonetheless contributed widely. Others did not contribute much at all, in either attendance or contribution. Although it may have been a less intimidating atmosphere in some ways than the Commons chamber, it was also more demanding, in that an interest and knowledge of the subject was assumed, and the smaller numbers meant that there was no place to hide. If you were there, the extent of your contribution, large or small, was apparent.

⁶⁸ SC Deb (C) 9 Jun 1931 cc714-722.

Chapter Six

'The evidence we want will not be forthcoming if a lot of men are sitting round the table':¹

Women and Select Committee service

Select committees presented quite a different environment from standing committees. Unlike standing committees, which were appointed to scrutinize a stage of legislation, Parliamentary select committees were appointed to examine public policy and administration and other specific issues. They took oral and written evidence and published reports. Their function was similar to other committees of enquiry such as Royal Commissions and government departmental committees, but they differed in being Parliamentary bodies. Investigatory Parliamentary committee work has been traced back hundreds of years, with a committee system developing in Westminster during the 16th century. Witnesses might be 'minors or peers, bankrupts and aliens, felons and even lunatics.'²

Select committee membership consisted of small numbers of MPs from various parties in the Commons, Lords, or both (a joint select committee). Some House of Commons select committees were appointed every session, dealing with matters of Parliamentary administration such as petitions and standing orders; the numbers of such 'core' committees varied over time but there were eight in the period following the First World War.³ Others were appointed to consider subjects on an ad hoc basis. This included issues internal to Parliament, such as sitting times,⁴ proposed legislation,⁵ or specific subjects of topical

¹ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AA/33, 21 Jan 1942. Sir Ralph Glyn (Conservative), Chairman of the Fighting Services sub-committee of the National Expenditure Committee.

² W Ivor Jennings, *Parliament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p264; T G B Cocks and Strathearn Gordon, *A people's conscience: a survey of six parliamentary enquiries held between 1729 and 1837* (Constable, 1952).

³ Privileges, Public Petitions, Publications and Debates, Selection, Chairman's Panel, Standing Orders, and Kitchen and Refreshment Rooms. All select committees referred to in this chapter are Commons committees unless stated otherwise.

⁴ For example, the Select Committees on Members' Expenses 1920; Hours of Meeting and Rising of the House 1929-30.

⁵ For example, the Select Committees on the Architects Registration Bill, 1927; Musical Copyright bill 1929-30. These are general investigations into the bills and this should not be confused with the legislative stage each bill would also go through in standing committee.

interest.⁶ Over time, some ad hoc select committees came to be established every year. During the interwar period these included the Public Accounts Committee (established 1861, still in existence today) and the Estimates Committee (1912-1914 and 1921-1970).⁷

Women as witnesses

The first involvement of women with select committees was as witnesses. Although the first time a woman gave evidence to a committee in Parliament cannot be precisely verified, women have appeared before the Commons and Lords throughout Parliament's history. For example, Ann Fitzharris gave evidence at the bar of the House of Commons in 1688 on the plight of herself and her three children after the execution of her husband.⁸ Women gave evidence in the House of Lords as witnesses on occasions such as proceedings on divorce bills.⁹

One of the earliest female witnesses to give evidence in person at a Parliamentary select committee was the educationalist and penal reformer Mary Carpenter, a witness for the House of Commons Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles in 1852. The committee treated her as an expert without reference to her gender, and made extensive reference to her publication, 'Reformatory Schools for the children of the Perishing and Dangerous Classes, and for Juvenile Offenders'.¹⁰ A few years later, six women were among 13 witnesses who gave evidence to a House of Lords Select Committee on Needlewomen Limitation of Hours, about the effect of long hours and poor working and living conditions on

⁶ For example, the Select Committees on Performing Animals 1922-23; Betting Duty 1923.

⁷ Subject-based committees were set up in the 1960s, although the modern day select committee system where every government department is shadowed by a select committee (e.g. the Home Office is scrutinised by the Home Affairs Committee) only dates from 1979.

⁸ *House of Commons Journal*, vol 10, p61. Christopher Jones remarks that women 'not seen as bright, able or experienced enough to serve in it... could naturally always offend the House, or be forced to beg from it, or satisfy its prurient curiosity.' Christopher Jones, *The Great Palace: the story of Parliament* (London: BBC, 1983), p201.

⁹ For example Amelia Laughher, a maid, gave oral evidence regarding an affair between her mistress, Jessy Campbell, and Edward Addison in the first divorce act brought by a woman in 1801. *House of Lords Journal*, vol 43, 22 April 1801, pp115-116. Jane Campbell divorced Addison on the grounds of 'incestuous adultery' with her sister Jessy.

¹⁰ *Report from the House of Commons Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles*, HC 515 (1852). She also provided a written memorandum for the committee afterwards, a 'Narrative of Seven Boys who have been Thieves, and who during the last Fifteen Months have been settled in an Honest Way of Life.' Appendix No 11, pp463-466.

the health of young dressmakers in 1855.¹¹ By the early 1880s there are a number of examples of women giving evidence in person to Commons and Lords select committees, including Josephine Butler.¹² In 1881-1882, the House of Lords Select Committee on the Law relating to the Protection of Young Girls interviewed 21 witnesses on the subject of child prostitution, of whom two were women.¹³ In 1906, a number of female Post Office employees gave evidence to the Commons Select Committee on Post Office Servants.¹⁴

Women as specialist advisors

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries women were appointed as members of investigatory government bodies, such as Royal Commissions.¹⁵ However, select committee membership was drawn exclusively from MPs in the Commons and/or peers in the Lords, so there could be no women members of select committees until women became MPs from 1919. It was possible, however, to co-opt women onto sub-committees of select committees, effectively acting as specialist advisors, and this has been overlooked. One of the earliest examples of this was the Select Committee on Luxury Duty in 1918.¹⁶ This committee was set

¹¹ *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee appointed to consider of the expediency or in expediency in the Needlewomen, Limitation of hours of labour bill [H.L.]*, HL 167 (1855). Referred to in 'Women's work in nineteenth-century London: a study of the years 1820-60s' pp3-56 in Sally Alexander, *Becoming a woman, and other essays in 19th and 20th century feminist history* (London: Virago, 1994).

¹² Josephine Butler and Mary Webb gave evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1882. *Report from the Select Committee on Contagious Diseases Acts; together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix*, HC 340 (1882). Webb was the Lady Superintendent at Lock Hospital. Butler is described as the 'Wife of the Rev. G. Butler.'

¹³ *Report from the Select Committee on the Law relating to the protection of young girls*, HL 145 (1881) and HL 188 (1882). Ellice Hopkins and Anna Wilkes gave evidence of girls aged 13-14 and younger engaged in prostitution. The Lords' report recommended that the age of carnal knowledge offence be raised from 13 to 16 and age of unlawful abduction be raised from 16 to 21.

¹⁴ *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office Servants*, HC 380 (1906).

¹⁵ The first women members of a Royal Commission were Assistant Commissioners on the 1891-4 Labour Commission (Eliza Orme, May Abraham, Clara Collet and Margaret Hardinge Irwin). The first full commissioners were on the Commission of Secondary Education in 1894 (Lucy Cavendish, Sophie Bryant and Eleanor Sidgwick). Elaine Harrison, *Office-Holders in Modern Britain: Volume 10 - Officials of Royal Commissions of Inquiry 1870-1939* (University of London: Institute of Historical Research, 1995).

¹⁶ In 1944, six (male) special advisors were appointed to the Select Committee on House of Commons (Rebuilding). This was such a rare occurrence that the Commons Committee Office researched precedents. They identified the Select Committee on Luxury Duty, plus Select Committees on Transport 1918 (no women), on the Telephone Service in 1921-22 (no women), and on Indian Constitutional

up to consider what articles ought to be classed as articles of luxury. It had a membership of 14 MPs whose names are dutifully recorded on the return of select committees. But it also co-opted seven women members for its sub-committees, whose names appear only in the body of the report. Sub-committee 2 on 'Articles used chiefly by women' included Lady St Helier, Mrs H B Irving and Miss M Craig;¹⁷ sub-committee 3 on 'Furniture and other Household Articles' Mrs Vaughan Nash and Miss Violet Markham;¹⁸ and sub-committee 4 on 'Miscellaneous', the Hon Mrs Frederick Guest and Miss Beatrice Chamberlain.¹⁹

All did not go smoothly for the committee, which found its task very difficult. This was initially in identifying what articles and services could be defined as 'luxuries' in the first place, and then in trying to place a potential level of tax upon them. Working with little guidance or support, the women found the task almost impossible. The report baldly records that Margaret Craig resigned on 21 June, and Robert Harcourt, Violet Markham and Mrs Vaughan Nash were discharged on 18 June 1918, but this conceals a much more complicated situation. Harcourt at least was certainly on the committee after that date,²⁰ and whether Markham and Nash resigned or were discharged was a moot point. Sir Francis Acland, the Chairman, wrote to both asking them to rejoin on 20 June but they refused.²¹ A draft report proposed by Harcourt included references to the changes of personnel ('There have been alarms and excursions, resignations and rumours of resignations') and referred to how the 'only working-class woman

Reform in 1933 (representatives including women, covered later in this chapter). Parliamentary Archives, HC/CL/CO/1/A6. They overlooked the two men who advised the Kitchen Committee in 1916 (see below).

¹⁷ Lady St. Helier (Susan Mary Elizabeth Jeune) was the widow of senior judge Francis Henry Jeune; retired actress and charity worker Dorothea Baird was married to the actor H B Irving; Margaret Craig was from the National Federation of Women Workers.

¹⁸ Rosalind Nash was the wife of economist Vaughan Nash, private secretary to Prime Ministers Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith; Violet Markham was a social reformer and writer, and a founder member of the National Women's Anti-Suffrage League in 1908 (as was Beatrice Chamberlain).

¹⁹ Amy Phipps Guest was the wife of Frederick Guest, Liberal MP and Lloyd George's chief whip 1917-21; Beatrice Chamberlain was Austen Chamberlain's sister (she died in the influenza epidemic later in 1918).

²⁰ *The Times*, 5 Jul 1918, records: 'The domestic difficulties of the Select Committee on Luxury Duty continue... It seems that Mr Harcourt at first decided to resign from the Committee, and then changed his mind, but not before the House as a whole had been given a second glimpse of Mr Acland and his harassed colleagues.' Harcourt and Acland were both Liberal MPs.

²¹ London School of Economics [hereafter LSE] Archives, Markham 2/4. Acland to Markham, 20 Jun 1918; confidential letter from Markham to A Spender of the *Westminster Gazette*, 26 Jun 1918.

member [Craig] had, in a manner of speaking, walked out and banged the door.²² The participation of women was seen as important. *The Times* claimed credit for their inclusion, having published a letter from Lady Ridley (Rosamond Ridley) on 30 April suggesting that the committee should co-opt at least one woman, and there was subsequent criticism of the price limits on clothes in the committee report by a woman correspondent, directly linking this deficiency to the departures of Markham, Nash and Craig.²³ As Herbert Samuel said in the Commons, whatever had happened, 'it was thought necessary that they should be appointed.'²⁴

Violet Markham's papers concerning the sub-committee show that her feelings about the tax were compounded by dissatisfaction with the way the committee worked:

I have no words to describe how loose end are the proceedings of the sub-committees. Acland, the chairman of the main committee, has never called us together; no instructions have been issued by the parent Committee, and no general principles laid down for us to follow. The Sub-Committees are composed of politicians and amateur ladies who are absolutely unfitted to deal with a highly technical matter of this kind. We have been given no officials, no experts to help us.²⁵

She also wrote, 'In all my experience of public work I have never known business conducted in such a slip shod, loose end way as by the Select Committee and sub-committees.'²⁶ A veteran of investigative work outside Parliament, Markham clearly had different expectations from her male MP colleagues as to how committees should operate. Her outsider's insight into the chaotic nature of a House of Commons select committee is illuminating. Markham's papers show that the other women on the sub-committees were similarly dissatisfied, with the possible exception of Lady St. Helier. Beatrice Chamberlain wrote to Markham on 24 May saying 'It would indeed be extraordinarily helpful if we seven women could meet and come to some kind of agreement as to the line we are to take,' and all the women except Chamberlain

²² *Report from the Select Committee on Luxury Duty*, HC 101 (1918), pp29-31.

²³ *The Times*, 15 Aug 1918.

²⁴ HC Deb 23 Oct 1918 vol 110 c816, Samuel.

²⁵ LSE Archives, Markham 2/4. Markham to J A R Marriott MP, 23 May 1918.

²⁶ *Ibid*, Markham to Geoffrey Dawson of *The Times*, 4 June 1918.

(who was not available) and Lady St. Helier subsequently held a meeting.²⁷ After their discharge from the committee, Markham and Vaughan Nash supplied a memorandum which explained the difficulties they had found. This was printed in the committee report, and concluded:

We as members of the sub-committee, have no access to the official information and advice which could alone justify us in taking a share in the responsible and delicate task of fixing prices for taxation on the method proposed.

The evidence of witnesses has deepened in us the conviction that the sub committee is in no position to settle a long list of detailed prices without exhaustive inquiries into a multiplicity of trade questions.

It is with deep regret that we have arrived at the conclusion that we cannot recommend any schedule. We further regret that as we are precluded from making constructive proposals to meet the difficulties encountered, our attitude must appear critical and unhelpful.

19th June 1918. (Signed), Violet Markham. Rosalind Nash.²⁸

This memorandum is significant because all the men on the sub-committees were also on the main committee, but the women could not be because they were not MPs, and they could not therefore put their names on (or withhold them from) the report. They had been co-opted to give a womanly input, yet were effectively excluded from the decision-making. There is a parallel with women's experience in local government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as traced by Patricia Hollis. Women working as workhouse visitors who were dissatisfied with conditions had 'no power and no position' to change things, by contrast to those elected as poor law guardians; women co-opted onto education boards found they did not have 'the sense of equal right, the sense of security, or the feeling of responsibility' that they had as elected members.²⁹ Violet Markham experienced similar frustrations in Parliament, trying to influence a select committee decision making process. She stood as a

²⁷ LSE Archives, Markham 2/5.

²⁸ *Report from the Select Committee on Luxury Duty*, HC 101 (1918), p15.

²⁹ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies elect: women in English local government, 1865-1914* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1987), p200, p128.

candidate in the 1918 general election just a few months after these events.³⁰ This decision may have been influenced by her experiences on this sub-committee, having seen firsthand the limits imposed by not being an MP.

Following the report and recommendations on luxury duty, there was extensive criticism in the press, and the government announced in April 1919 that they would not proceed because the schedules needed correction. In peacetime they could not drive the duty through as there were strong objections to such a tax.³¹

How many women were appointed to select committees?

Having ascertained that most women MPs sat on Standing Committees, it is interesting to discover that the same is not true for select committees. Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1³² illustrate the number of women on select committees as compared to the number of women MPs. All the numbers involved here are very small; nevertheless they illustrate that most select committees in the inter-war period did not have a woman member (at least in part because there were so few women); and that most women MPs in the inter-war period did not sit on a select committee.

Session	No of MPs in the Commons	No of women MPs in the Commons	No of MPs on select committees	No of women MPs on select committees	No of select committees	No of select committees with a woman member
1920	707	1	213	1	24	1
1921	707	1	163	0	16	0
1922	615	2	202	1	23	2
1923	615	3	197	2	17	2
1924	615	8	161	2	15	1
1924-5	615	4	174	2	17	2
1926	615	6	145	2	14	2

³⁰ She stood 'most reluctantly' in Mansfield, previously held by her brother Arthur Markham, who died in 1916. Violet Markham, *Duty and citizenship: the correspondence and political papers of Violet Markham 1896-1953*, ed Helen Jones (London: Historian's Press, 1994), p11.

³¹ TNA, CUST 118/211.

³² The data in the tables in this chapter are compiled from *House of Commons Returns of Select Committees*. These returns were printed in *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* up to 1931. Thereafter they can be found among the House of Commons Unprinted Papers in the Parliamentary Archives. PA, HC/CL/JO/10. The returns for two sessions (1942/3 and 1944/5) are missing and this data was carefully reconstructed from the reports and minutes of proceedings of the individual committees.

Session	No of MPs in the Commons	No of women MPs in the Commons	No of MPs on select committees	No of women MPs on select committees	No of select committees	No of select committees with a woman member
1927	615	6	142	2	15	1
1928	615	7	147	2	14	1
1928-9	615	10	131	2	14	1
1929-30	615	14	171	3	19	2
1930-31	615	16	174	7	16	4
1931-32	615	15	147	3	15	2
1932-33	615	15	144	3	14	3
1933-34	615	15	135	3	12	3
1934-35	615	14	116	3	13	2
1935-36	615	9	145	4	16	2
1936-37	615	9	159	2	15	1
1937-38	615	10	139	2	14	1
1938-39	615	12	155	2	16	2
1939-40	615	12	123	4	11	2
1940-41	615	13	120	3	12	2
1941-42	615	13	124	3	12	2
1942-43	615	14	147	7	14	3
1943-44	615	14	142	4	14	3
1944-45	615	14	144	3	15	2

Table 6.1 Number of women MPs on select committees

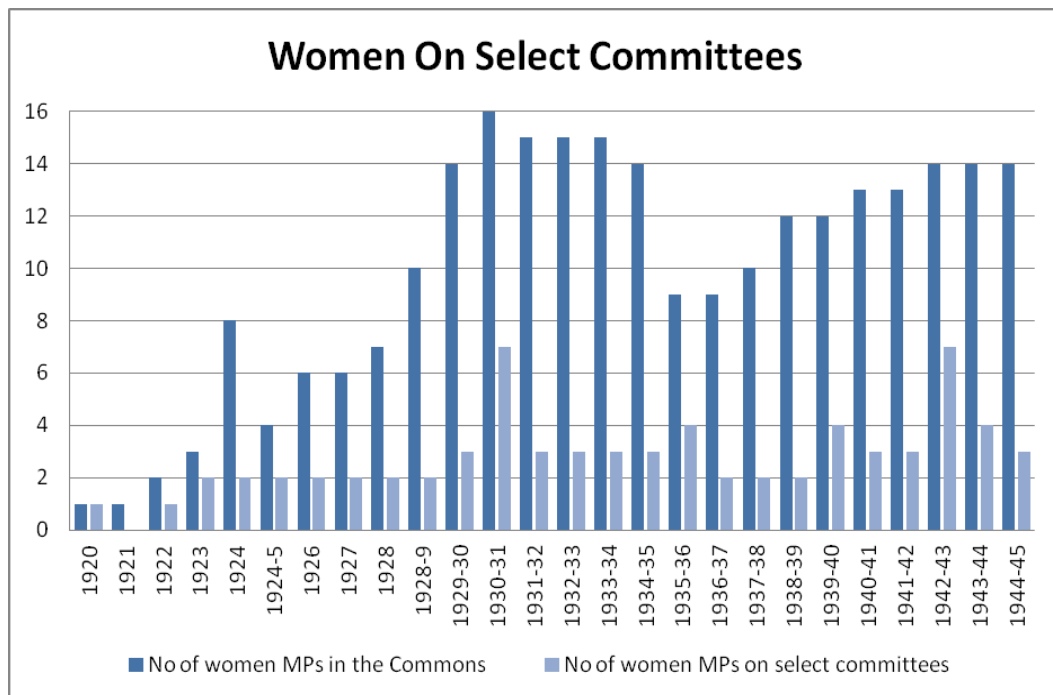


Figure 6.1 Women on select committees

Which select committees had women members?

On which committees did women MPs sit? Table 6.2 lists for the first time all the select committees which had women members in the interwar period, and the women concerned.

Session	Select Committees with women members	Women members
1920	Criminal Law Amendment & Sexual Offences bill	Nancy Astor (Con)
1921	[NONE]	[NONE]
1922	British Nationality (Married Women) bill	Margaret Wintringham (Lib)
	Guardianship of Infants	Margaret Wintringham (Lib)
1923	British Nationality (Married Women) bill	Margaret Wintringham (Lib)
	Guardianship of Infants	Wintringham (Lib), Mabel Philipson (Con)
1924	Kitchen	Mabel Philipson (Con), Dorothy Jewson (Lab)
1924-25	Kitchen	Mabel Philipson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
	General Nursing Council	Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1926	Kitchen	Mabel Philipson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
	Nursing Homes (Registration)	Mabel Philipson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1927	Kitchen	Mabel Philipson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1928	Kitchen	Mabel Philipson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1928-29	Kitchen	Mabel Philipson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1929-30	Capital Punishment	Ethel Bentham (Lab)
	Kitchen	Cynthia Mosley (Lab), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1930-31	Kitchen	Cynthia Mosley (Lab), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab), Countess of Iveagh (Con)
	Capital Punishment	Ethel Bentham (Lab)
	Wills & Intestacies (Family Maintenance Bill)	Lucy Noel-Buxton (Lab), Eleanor Rathbone (Ind)
	Shop Assistants	Leah Manning (Lab)
1931-32	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Helen Shaw (Con)

Session	Select Committees with women members	Women members
	Public Petitions	Mary Pickford (Con)
1932-33	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Helen Shaw (Con)
	Public Petitions	Mary Pickford (Con)
	Indian Constitutional Reform (Joint)	Mary Pickford (Con)
1933-34	Indian Constitutional Reform (Joint)	Mary Pickford (Con)
	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Helen Shaw (Con)
	Public Petitions	Mary Pickford (Con)/Norah Runge (Con)
1934-35	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Helen Shaw (Con)
	Public Petitions	Norah Runge (Con)
1935-36	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con)/Mavis Tate (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
	Water Resources & Supplies (Joint)	Irene Ward (Con)
1936-37	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1937-38	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
1938-39	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
	London Government Bill [HL] (Joint)	Thelma Cazalet (Con)
1939-40	Kitchen	Thelma Cazalet (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)/ Agnes Hardie (Lab)
	National Expenditure Committee (NEC)	Lady Davidson (Con), Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)
	<i>NEC Navy Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Trade Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Ellen Wilkinson (Lab)</i>
1940-41	Kitchen	Lady Davidson (Con), Agnes Hardie (Lab)
	National Expenditure Committee (NEC)	Lady Davidson (Con), Irene Ward (Con)
	<i>NEC Navy Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Supply Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Irene Ward (Con)</i>
1941-42	Kitchen	Lady Davidson (Con), Agnes Hardie (Lab)
	National Expenditure Committee (NEC)	Lady Davidson (Con), Irene Ward (Con)
	<i>NEC Co-ordinating Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Production & Supply Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Irene Ward (Con)</i>

Session	Select Committees with women members	Women members
	<i>NEC Women's Medical Services Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con), Irene Ward (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Fighting Services Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Irene Ward (Con)</i>
1942-43	Kitchen	Lady Davidson (Con), Agnes Hardie (Lab)
	<i>National Expenditure Committee (NEC)</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con), Irene Ward (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Special Inquiries Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Irene Ward (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Dept Inquiries B Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con)</i>
	Equal Compensation	Megan Lloyd George (Lib), Thelma Cazalet-Keir (Con), Mavis Tate (Con), Agnes Hardie (Lab), Edith Summerskill (Lab)
1943-44	House of Commons (Rebuilding)	Eleanor Rathbone (Ind)
	Kitchen	Lady Davidson (Con), Agnes Hardie (Lab)
	National Expenditure Committee (NEC)	Lady Davidson (Con), Irene Ward (Con)
	<i>NEC Sub-Committee C</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Sub-Committee E</i>	<i>Irene Ward (Con)</i>
1944-45	Kitchen	Lady Davidson (Con), Agnes Hardie (Lab)
	National Expenditure Committee (NEC)	Lady Davidson (Con), Irene Ward (Con)
	<i>NEC Sub-Committee B</i>	<i>Irene Ward (Con)</i>
	<i>NEC Sub-Committee C</i>	<i>Lady Davidson (Con)</i>

Table 6.2: List of select committees with women members

To place this information in context, Tables 6.3 lists the 'core' sessional committees with their dates and when women were appointed, and Table 6.4 lists all the remaining select committees, which had no women members in this period.

Sessions	Regular sessional committees	Notes
1919-1944/5	Chairman's Panel	No women members
1919-1944/5	Privileges	No women members Not appointed: 1920-1922, 1934/5-1936/7
1919-1944/5	Public Petitions	Women members 1931/2-1934/5
1919-1944/5	Public Accounts	No women members
1919-1944/5	Publications & Debates Reports	No women members Not appointed: 1934/5, 1935/6

1919-1944/5	Court of Referees	No women members
1919-1944/5	Committee of Selection	No women members
1919-1944/5	Standing Orders	No women members
1921-1938/9	Estimates	No women members Not appointed: 1936/7
1921-1937/8	Consolidation Bills (Joint)	No women members
1919-1944/5	Kitchen	Women members 1924 onwards

Table 6.3 - Regular 'core' select committees

Session	All other select committees (with no women members)
1919-1920	Government of India Bill (Joint)
	National Expenditure
	Pensions
1919-1921	General Committee on Railway & Canal Bills
1919-1922	Divorce Bills
1919, 1924	Commons
1919	Government Works at Cippenham
	High Prices and Profits
	Land Values
	City of London Police bill
	Dormant Bank Balances & Unclaimed Securities bill
	Transport
	Local Legislation
	Members' Expenses
1920	Increases of Wealth
	Ministers' Remuneration
	Business Premises
	Indemnity bill
	Law of Property (Joint)
	Parliamentary Panel
	Procedure governing Bills which involve Charges
	Telephone Charges
1921-1922	Indian Affairs (Joint)
	Performing Animals
	Telephone Services
	Teachers in Grant Aided Schools (Superannuation)
1922-1923	Navy & Army Canteens
	HC (Gallery Accommodation)
1922, 1924/5, 1928	Expiring Laws Continuance Act
1922	Training and Employment of Disabled Ex-Service Men
	Civil Service (Employment of Conscientious Objectors)
1923-1924/5	Sittings of Parliament (Joint)
1923	Betting Duty

	Carriage of Goods By Sea bill (Joint)
	Matrimonial Causes (Regulation of Reports) bill
1924/5	Moneylenders bill (Joint)
	Election of a Member (Unemployment Insurance Umpire)
1927	Procedure (Unofficial Members' Business)
	Architects Registration bill
	Law of Libel Amendment bill
1928	Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland
1928/9	Suspension of Bills (Joint)
1929/30	Hours of Meeting & Rising of the House
	Ministers' Remuneration
	Musical Copyright bill
	Procedure (Unofficial Members' Business)
	Shop Assistants
1930/31	East Africa (joint)
	Expiring Laws
	Procedure on Public Business
1932	Gas Undertakings (joint)
	Police Forces (Amalgamation)
	Procedure
	Sky Writing
1932/3	Gas Undertakings (joint)
	Local Government Bill (Joint)
1934/5-1935/6	Refreshment Rooms and Lavatories (Joint)
1934/5	Water Resources and Supplies
	Western Australia
	Witnesses
1935/6-1936/7	Civil List
	Medicine Stamp Duties
1935/6	Measurement of Gas (Joint)
	Public Health Bill (Joint)
	Public Sewers (Joint)
1936/7	Gas Prices (Joint)
	Private Bill Procedure (Local Legislation Clause)
	Procedure relating to Money Resolutions
1937/8-1938/9	Official Secrets Acts
1937/8	Collecting Charities (Regulation) Bill (Joint)
	Food and Drugs Bill (Joint)
1938/9	Breaking up of Streets by Statutory Undertakings (Joint)
	Parliamentary Elections (Mr Speaker's Seat)
	Solicitor's Bill (Joint)
	Water Undertakings (Joint)
1939/40-1940/1	Conduct of a Member

1940/1	Offices of Profit Under the Crown
1941/2-1942/3	Disposal and Custody of Documents
1941/2	Sugar Industry Bill
1943/4	Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (Joint)
1943/4-1944/5	Palace of Westminster (Accommodation) (Joint)
1943/4-1944/5	Statutory Rules & Orders
1944/5	Private Bill Standing Orders
	Library

Table 6.4 - All other select committees with no women members

The rationale by which women were placed on some committees and not on others can only be surmised. As with standing committees, the body responsible for this was the Committee for Selection, which would have taken its direction from party whips anxious to obtain their share of representation. Looking at the lists of committees on which women were placed, it is immediately obvious that these mostly dealt with what were defined as 'women's' interests – the Kitchen Committee, committees on nursing, guardianship of children, the nationality of married women, sexual offences. This is particularly obvious during the 1920s but less so during the 1930s, when women also appear on the select committees on Indian Constitutional Reform, and Public Petitions. The party affiliation of the women MPs shows an apparent effort to have one from each party on the Kitchen Committee, wherever possible. Otherwise there was unsurprisingly a preponderance from whichever party was in power. More Labour women were therefore involved during 1929-1931, while the domination of Conservatives between 1931-1935 is because there were no women Labour MPs in this period.

How do women's select committee attendance records compare to men's?

Having established on which committees women MPs were involved, the next question is how frequently they attended. Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show the average sittings attended by men for each select committee in each session, obtained by adding up the sittings they attended and dividing by the number of male members on the committee. The numbers of women members are so small compared to the men that an average figure for women would be statistically meaningless, so all the women's names and sittings attended are given.

Session	No of sittings	Average sittings men attended	Women members	Party	Sittings Attended
1924	20	10	Philipson	C	3
			Jewson	L	12
1924-5	16	10	Philipson	C	2
			Wilkinson	L	7

Session	No of sittings	Average sittings men attended	Women members	Party	Sittings Attended
1926	14	7	Philipson	C	1
			Wilkinson	L	2
1927	14	7	Philipson	C	0
			Wilkinson	L	4
1928	10	5	Philipson	C	0
			Wilkinson	L	3
1928-9	9	5	Philipson	C	2
			Wilkinson	L	4
1929-30	18	9	Mosley	L	9
			Wilkinson	L	9
1930-31	17	8	Iveagh	C	7
			Mosley	L	3
			Wilkinson	L	7
1931-32	13	7	Cazalet	C	8
			Shaw	C	12
1932-33	13	7	Cazalet	C	5
			Shaw	C	9
1933-34	12	6	Cazalet	C	8
			Shaw	C	7
1934-35	14	6	Cazalet	C	8
			Shaw	C	10
1935-36	13	5	Cazalet	C	6
			Tate	C	1
			Wilkinson	L	4
1936-37	16	10	Cazalet	C	10
			Wilkinson	L	7
1937-38	14	8	Cazalet	C	8
			Wilkinson	L	5
1938-39	19	11	Cazalet	C	9
			Wilkinson	L	9
1939-40	16	7	Cazalet	C	4
			Wilkinson/Hardie	L	6
1940-41	15	5	Davidson	C	5
			Hardie	L	11
1941-42	16	7	Davidson	C	3
			Hardie	L	11
1942-43	18	7	Davidson	C	9
			Hardie	L	11
1943-44	15	7	Davidson	C	4
			Hardie	L	7
1944-	13	7	Davidson	C	1

Session	No of sittings	Average sittings men attended	Women members	Party	Sittings Attended
45			Hardie	L	8

Table 6.5: select committee Attendances - Kitchen Committee

Select Committee	Session	No of sittings	Men average sittings attended	Woman members	Party	Sittings attended
Criminal Law Amendment	1920	17	11	Astor	C	15
Guardianship of Infants	1922	3	2	Wintringham	Lib	2
	1923	12	6	Wintringham	Lib	7
				Philipson	C	9
Nationality of Married Women	1922	3	2	Wintringham	Lib	1
	1923	11	6	Wintringham	Lib	9
General Nursing Council	1924-5	7	6	Philipson	C	5
Nursing Homes Registration	1926	14	8	Philipson	C	2
				Wilkinson	L	6
Capital Punishment	1929-30	27	18	Bentham	L	25
	1930-31	4	2	Bentham	L	4
Wills & Intestacies	1930-31	5	4	Rathbone	Ind	5
				Noel-Buxton	L	5
Shop Assistants	1930-31	36	24	Manning ³³	L	12
Public Petitions	1931-32	4	2	Pickford	C	2
	1932-33	5	2	Pickford	C	2
	1933-34	5	2	Pickford/Runge	C/C	3
	1934-35	4	1	Runge	C	2
Indian Constitutional Reform	1932-33	76	67	Pickford	C	74
	1933-34	84	73	Pickford ³⁴	C	28
Water Resources & Supplies	1935-36	15	7	Irene Ward	C	15
London Government bill	1938-39	3	3	Cazalet	C	0
National Expenditure Committee	1939-40	16	10	Davidson	C	12
				Wilkinson ³⁵	L	7
	1940-41	20	11	Davidson	C	16
				Ward	C	7

³³ Manning was only put onto the Shop Assistants Committee mid-way through 1931.³⁴ Pickford died before the Indian Constitutional Reform Committee reported in 1934.³⁵ Wilkinson left the NEC mid-session after being appointed to the government in 1940.

Select Committee	Session	No of sittings	Men average sittings attended	Woman members	Party	Sittings attended
	1941-42	27	15	Davidson	C	23
				Ward	C	22
	1942-43	21	11	Davidson	C	12
				Ward	C	7
	1943-44	21	12	Davidson	C	12
				Ward	C	11
	1944-45	10	5	Davidson	C	0
				Ward	C	7
NEC Navy Sub-committee	1939-40	62	39	Davidson	C	60
	1940-41	46	31	Davidson	C	42
NEC Trade etc Sub-committee	1939-40	61	44	Wilkinson ³⁶	L	1
NEC Supply Sub-committee	1940-41	72	52	Ward	C	24
NEC Women's Medical Services sub-committee	1941-42	32	n/a	Davidson	C	32
				Ward	C	32
NEC Co-ordinating Sub-committee	1941-42	16	14	Davidson	C	11
NEC Prod & Supply Sub-committee	1941-42	96	49	Ward	C	55
NEC Fighting Services sub-cttee	1941-42	30	23	Ward	C	23
NEC Special Inquiries sub-cttee	1942-43	38	27	Ward	C	16
NEC Dept Inquiries B sub-cttee	1942-43	23	13	Davidson	C	19
NEC Sub-committee E	1943-44	26	19	Ward	C	8
NEC Sub-committee C	1943-44	21	13	Davidson	C	12
	1944-45	8	3	Davidson	C	2
NEC Sub-committee B	1944-45	9	5	Ward	C	6
Equal Compensation	1942-43	14	12	Lloyd George	Lib	12
				Tate	C	13
				Cazalet-Keir	C	14
				Hardie	L	13
				Summerskill	L	13
Commons (Rebuilding)	1943-44	21	17	Rathbone	Ind	17

Table 6.6: Select Committees Attendances excluding Kitchen Committee

³⁶ Ibid.

Table 6.5 focuses on the Kitchen Committee. These figures show that some women MPs, notably Mabel Philipson, were poor attendees, attending considerably fewer sittings than their male colleagues on average. Others, such as Thelma Cazalet, compare better: Cazalet's attendance was as good as or better than the male average in six of her eight Parliamentary sessions, and Helen Shaw had above average attendance in all four of her sessions. Ellen Wilkinson was an active member of the Kitchen Committee, but her attendance record is less good than the average male attendance in all but one of the eleven sessions she was on the Committee.

Table 6.6 gives the same figures for all the other committees containing women. These show a generally good attendance by women MPs compared with their male counterparts. In particular, Irene Ward attended all 15 sittings of the Water Resources & Supplies Committee in 1935-36; Nancy Astor attended 15 of 17 sittings of the Criminal Law Amendment Committee in 1920; Joan Davidson attended 60 of 62 meetings of the National Expenditure Committee's Navy sub-committee in 1939-40. Mary Pickford's figures for Indian Constitutional Reform in 1933-34 were reduced by her death part-way through the session; she was previously conscientious about attending this committee, as can be seen from her impressive record in the previous session.

Attendances are, of course, only a partial indication of how seriously members treated their committee work. This research will now consider the contribution of the women members as reflected in reports, minutes of evidence and other records of these committees.

The Kitchen Committee

Women were present on only two of the 'core' committees re-appointed every session. Mary Pickford sat on the Select Committee on Public Petitions for several years, and after her death, was replaced by Norah Runge.³⁷ However, the Select Committee on the House of Commons (Kitchen and Refreshment Rooms), or 'Kitchen Committee', had the highest number of women members by far. From 1924 there was a constant female presence on this committee, and in 1931 no fewer than three of the total sixteen women MPs sat on it. Although overseeing the domestic arrangements of the House of Commons, rather than dealing with matters of public policy and legislation, it shows women MPs influencing part of a very male-centric

³⁷ Pickford died in 1934. There are no records of proceedings of the Select Committee on Public Petitions, only reports, so it is not possible to ascertain the contribution of either Pickford or Runge beyond attendances.

administration, moving into hitherto all-male areas. A detailed look at the Kitchen Committee is therefore justified.

The Kitchen Committee was first appointed in 1848 and by the inter-war period had 17 members. In each session it published a report with a statement of income and expenditure, including numbers of meals, receipts from meals, wages, salaries and health insurance, expenses, laundry etc, and repairs and renewals. At its meetings, it considered issues such as lending rooms to Members for functions, dealing with complaints and suggestions, chasing Members for overdue accounts, staffing, purchases of items such as teaspoons, apples and dish-washing machines and making decisions on weighty issues such as whether British table linen only should be used (yes),³⁸ whether to serve globe artichokes (no),³⁹ and instructing that the chef be directed to experiment with fried herrings with the heads and bones removed.⁴⁰

Like all select committees, it was seen to suffer from a lack of specialist knowledge. This was admitted in 1916, when two men with more expert knowledge were invited to advise.⁴¹ The Chairman explained that the Kitchen Committee members were 'simply elected as House of Commons representatives and therefore have no anterior knowledge of how to conduct a business of this sort'. The two invited experts were George Reeves Smith, Managing Director of the Savoy, Carlton, Simpson & Co and Claridges' Hotels, and William Towle, previously Hotel Manager for the Midland Railway. Both were men despite the fact that the evidence taken in 1916 provides a rare insight into the employment of numerous female Refreshment staff. Of the total staff of 40 (reduced for reasons of wartime economy) 18 were women. They 'lived in' the House of Commons and included a housekeeper (who 'looks after the girls generally'), wine dispensers, barmaids, stillroom maids, tea room waitresses and housemaids. Some of the women were mentioned as very long-serving staff, although the knowledge and expertise they must have built up over time was clearly not sought by the committee. They included 'Miss Crisp in the tea room, who is getting married, has been here 26 years; Miss King, a wine dispenser, 19 years; Miss Pankhurst, at the Press Gallery bar, 17 years'.⁴²

³⁸ Kitchen Committee, 27 Mar 1930. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7.

³⁹ Ibid, 23 May 1935.

⁴⁰ Kitchen Committee, 12 Jul 1944. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/8.

⁴¹ *Select Committee on the House of Commons (Kitchen & Refreshment Rooms)*, HC 98 (1916).

⁴² Ibid. One can only assume Miss Pankhurst was no relation to her famous suffragette namesakes.

Given this high level of female staffing it is perhaps not surprising that women MPs were placed on the Kitchen Committee once there were more than one or two of them in the House of Commons. The manuscript minutes of the Kitchen Committee survive in the Parliamentary Archives and, although very dry and factual, some indication of the participation of the women can be gleaned from them. The Kitchen Committee appointed a Sub-Committee on Accounts, on which Mabel Philipson and Ellen Wilkinson were placed as early as 1925. Women MPs were then a constant presence until 1940-41. In 1928-29 Wilkinson was appointed to the Sub-Committee on Wines, and from then on, she or another woman MP was continually appointed to this sub-committee.⁴³

At her first meeting on 17 February 1925, Wilkinson made a mark. The Kitchen Committee 'Resolved, at the request of Miss Wilkinson, that particulars of the conditions of employment of the staff be supplied to new members.'⁴⁴ Wilkinson's biographer says that she challenged the working conditions of catering staff who were unemployed and unpaid during recess, 'small human matters, to which male Members were oblivious, often caught Ellen's attention'.⁴⁵ The Kitchen Committee minutes show some signs of improvements for staff over time, for example in 1929 it was resolved not only that the usual retaining allowance be paid to permanent staff during recess, but also that a week's pay in lieu of notice be given to temporary staff.⁴⁶ In 1939-40, thirty kitchen staff were given temporary employment at the Post Office over the Christmas recess.⁴⁷ Improvements were made to staff pay and allowances in 1931.⁴⁸ In 1933, when Cazalet and Shaw were on the Kitchen Committee, a pension fund was set up for retired servants of the Commons and a levy of one penny per meal served was set to pay for this retirement fund.⁴⁹

⁴³ It was renamed over time, becoming the Sub-Committee on Wines and Beers, and then Wines and Cigars. From 1938-39 it ceased to have a separate membership and all committee members belonged to it.

⁴⁴ Kitchen Committee, 17 Feb 1925. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/6.

⁴⁵ Betty D Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson 1891-1947* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p83.

⁴⁶ Kitchen Committee, 18 Jul 1929. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7.

⁴⁷ Kitchen Committee, 1 Feb 1940. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/8.

⁴⁸ Kitchen Committee, 12 Feb 1931. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7.

⁴⁹ Kitchen Committee, 4 May, 18 May, 16 Jul 1933. Ibid.

Notoriously, women, even if MPs, were excluded from some dining facilities in the House of Commons. In 1927, when Philipson and Wilkinson were on the Kitchen Committee, it proposed that Ladies should be admitted to the Dining Room (Strangers) Upstairs. Wilkinson's biographer credits her with this change.⁵⁰ However, the Kitchen Committee did not have the power to make rules of this kind. The Serjeant-at-Arms recommended to the Speaker that this change should not be allowed because the Dining Room was very busy, there was no Ladies' Cloakroom nearby, and 'Undoubtedly many Members of Parliament approve of there being one Dining Room in which male guests only (very often on business connected with the House) can be entertained by them.'⁵¹ Despite this, the committee minutes report that 'The Chairman reported that the Speaker was prepared to receive the advice of the Committee on this matter.'⁵² The committee considered a motion to request the Speaker to order that the room be available during dinner for lady guests when accompanied by a member. The motion passed, although the female MPs were split - Wilkinson voted for it and Philipson against - and the Speaker ruled that women could be entertained at dinner. Nancy Astor protested in the House of Commons, 'Why ladies for dinner only? Do not women need luncheon too?''⁵³ Nevertheless it was a victory, and Ellen entertained some women guests to a vegetarian non-alcoholic dinner to celebrate, causing one member, the Reverend Herbert Dunnico, to exclaim 'God bless my soul'.⁵⁴ Wilkinson was again on the Kitchen Committee in 1930, when the battle resumed over admitting women for lunch.⁵⁵

Yet there were limits to the participation of the women MPs. In 1936 a joint select committee was appointed to consider the possibility of merging the Lords and Commons kitchens. No woman was a member of this, nor was there any mention of women in the report, apart from a brief comment about the lack of lavatory facilities for female staff in the Lords 'for whom no

⁵⁰ Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson*, p83.

⁵¹ PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/13.

⁵² Kitchen Committee, 29 Nov 1928. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7.

⁵³ HC Deb 11 Dec 1928 vol 223 cc1919-20.

⁵⁴ Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson*. Citing *Daily News*, 13 Dec 1928. It is not clear whether the vegetarian non-alcoholic meal was a gesture or a preference.

⁵⁵ Kitchen Committee, 11 Dec 1930. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7.

provision was made in the original building', or for visitors.⁵⁶ By contrast, also in 1936, the Kitchen Committee considered the condition of the Ladies' Tea Room. Materials for refurnishing of the Ladies tea room were examined, and 'the final selection left to Miss Cazalet to decide.'⁵⁷

The Second World War saw a change of personnel, with Agnes Hardie replacing Wilkinson midway through the 1939/40 session, and Lady Davidson replacing Cazalet from the 1940/41 session. Hardie was an assiduous attendee, Davidson less so (her priority was the National Expenditure Committee, covered below). These were difficult times for the Kitchen Committee, which had to contend with rationing, severe staff shortages, catering when the House was recalled at short notice, providing meals 24 hours a day for staff on fire-watching duties, and dealing with a (not unfounded) perception that MPs received privileged food.⁵⁸ In April 1944 the Kitchen Committee was criticized very severely in the House, on the grounds that Commons refreshments were 'neither adequate nor good'.⁵⁹ Neither Davidson nor Hardie played any role in the debate.

The first committee with a woman MP member: the Joint Select Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and Sexual Offences Bill 1921

Away from the Kitchen Committee, women played a role on various ad-hoc select committees. The first committee with a woman MP as a member was the Joint Select Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and Sexual Offences Bill 1921. There was a series of criminal law amendment bills in the 1920s about which some women were especially concerned, such as those concerning the age of consent, prostitution and venereal disease. This bill is best known for a Commons amendment to make lesbianism an offence; it fell in the House of Lords on the grounds that 'The more you advertise vice by prohibiting it the more you will increase it.' The

⁵⁶ *Report by the Joint Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons appointed to consider the refreshment rooms and lavatories in the palace of Westminster* (HC 149), 1935-36. There is more about female staff in the Lords in Chapter 7.

⁵⁷ Kitchen Committee, 23 Jul 1936. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7.

⁵⁸ In 1944 the Kitchen Committee 'Resolved, that the sale of whisky in any month shall not exceed the average monthly quota supplied to the Department by more than 4 dozen bottles.' One wonders what Hardie, a temperance advocate, made of this! Kitchen Committee, 29 Mar 1944. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/8.

⁵⁹ HC Deb 6 Apr 1944 vol 398 cc2303-16.

Lord Chancellor, Lord Birkenhead, said, 'I would be bold enough to say that of every thousand women, taken as a whole, 999 have never even heard a whisper of these practices.'⁶⁰

Women's organisations, including NUSEC,⁶¹ the National Vigilance Association⁶² and the National Council on Women, lobbied hard on aspects of this bill. A memo dated 15 August 1921 from the Chief Whip to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Lord Onslow, refers to 'the very strong feeling in favour of the bill, more particularly among women's organisations.'⁶³ Women gave evidence to the Joint Select Committee, including Mrs Gotto, General Secretary for the National Council for Combating Venereal Disease, and medical experts.

Nancy Astor was the only woman MP on the committee (and the only woman MP at this time). She does not appear much in the minutes of evidence, but attended 15 of the 17 sittings and played an identifiable role behind the scenes. When it seemed that Clause 2, which abolished the defence of 'a reasonable cause to believe' that a girl was over the age of consent, might not be included in the bill Astor wrote to the government that if it were not included, she would move it as an amendment, and, if this amendment were not accepted, she would oppose the whole bill 'on behalf of all organised bodies of women.'⁶⁴ The clause was included and passed. Claud Schuster in the Lord Chancellor's Office, wrote 'we were told in the Lords that if the Clause was touched at all the Bill was dead.'⁶⁵

Lords versus Commons: the Joint Select Committee on the Nationality of Married Women 1923

The second woman MP, the Liberal Mrs Wintringham, sat on two select committees, both over sessions 1922 and 1923. The issues, equal guardianship of children and nationality of married

⁶⁰ HL Deb 15 Aug 1921 vol 43 c570, Earl of Malmesbury (Conservative); c574, Lord Chancellor. Laura Doan has discussed the problems for historians of lesbianism in an era where individuals lacked not only definitions, categories and labels but any sense of identity formation. Laura Doan, 'Topsy-turvydom: gender inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12(4) (2006), pp517-542

⁶¹ WL, 2/NSE/A/6/1.

⁶² WL, 4/NVA/4/13/04.

⁶³ TNA, LCO 2/469.

⁶⁴ Letter from Lady Astor, 15 Feb 1922. TNA, LCO 2/469.

⁶⁵ Claud Schuster to Attorney General, 1 Aug 1922. TNA, LCO 2/469.

women, had long been the subject of pressure from women's groups. In each case a joint select committee was set up to consider the issue. The Conservative Mabel Philipson joined Wintringham on the committee on guardianship after its first meeting in 1923. The committee was split, with Wintringham for and Philipson against. Philipson attended more sittings than Wintringham, but it was Wintringham's issue; it was thanks to her continuing efforts, including sponsoring a private member's bill, that a government bill finally passed in 1925.⁶⁶

In 1923 a joint select committee was set up to consider the long-standing issue of British women losing their nationality on marriage, following the Conservative MP Sir John Butcher's private members' bill on this subject the year before.⁶⁷ Wintringham had also been a member of the standing committee considering that bill, and was placed on the select committee where she attended a reasonable number of sittings and asked questions, although not very prominently. The Committee heard eleven witnesses but despite the subject matter, just one was a woman. The men were all civil servants and lawyers giving opinions on the legal position, the history and presumed difficulties. The one woman was political activist and lawyer Chrystal Macmillan, on behalf of the National Council on Women and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

The Committee reached an impasse in an interesting example of the Commons being very firmly on one side of a gender issue and the Lords on the other. The Chairman, Viscount Chelmsford,⁶⁸ submitted a draft report stating that the nationality of a woman should be that of her husband. Sir John Butcher submitted an alternative draft report stating the opposite, that a woman should be allowed the choice of nationality on her marriage. They divided with five in favour of the Chairman's report (all the Lords) and five against (all the MPs). Unable to agree, the committee simply reported its proceedings and evidence back to Parliament.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ The Home Office file remarked, 'I do not think however that a select committee can be considered an ideal body for the investigation of the questions in issue, especially if as last year it sits under an inexperienced chairman.' Note by Sir John Pedder. TNA, HO 45/12243.

⁶⁸ Viscount Chelmsford was a Conservative, although he served as First Lord of the Admiralty under the 1924 Labour government. He was formerly Governor of New South Wales (1909-1913) and Viceroy of India (1916-1921). P G Robb, 'Thesiger, Frederic John Napier, first Viscount Chelmsford (1868-1933)', *ODNB*.

⁶⁹ *Joint Select Committee on the Nationality of Married Women*, HC 115 (1923).

issue was not resolved until the British Nationality Act 1948 enabled married women to have an independent nationality.⁷⁰

Women members and women witnesses; the 1920s Nursing Committees and Philipson's Nursing Bill

The Select Committee on the General Nursing Council was appointed in 1925 to consider the rules of the GNC with regard to training for nurses. It took evidence on the nature of training and on how the profession was organised. One woman member, Ellen Wilkinson, attended five of the seven meetings. She asked questions but was not especially prominent. Women were however, prominent in another way in that of the fifteen witnesses who appeared before the committee, twelve were women; matrons and other nurses.⁷¹

This committee was followed by the Select Committee on Nursing Homes Registration 1926, whose members included Mabel Philipson and Ellen Wilkinson. Of 14 meetings, Wilkinson managed to attend six and Philipson just two. Philipson was nevertheless vocal on one of the occasions when she did attend, and clearly felt registration was needed; she referred to the letters she had received on the subject, suggesting that she was subject to lobbying.⁷² She also dared to ask representatives of the British Medical Association if any nursing homes took the opportunity to teach people about birth control.⁷³ Philipson heard a witness from the College of Nurses speak in favour of registration, and stated 'I think I am too much in sympathy with the witness's statement to ask any questions.'⁷⁴ Of the 36 witnesses before this committee, at least 20 were women,⁷⁵ a mixture of owners of nursing homes, women with experience of nursing homes, nurses and other medical professionals. Eight women witnesses gave evidence anonymously, referred to only as 'Miss B' or 'Mrs E.F.', because they were critical of appalling

⁷⁰ M Page Baldwin, 'Subject to Empire: married women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act', pp522-556 in *Journal of British Studies* 40(4), 2001.

⁷¹ *Select Committee on the General Nursing Council*, HC 167 (1924-1925).

⁷² *Select Committee on Nursing Homes Registration*, HC 103 (1925) p31.

⁷³ Dr E Rowland Fothergill said he had never heard of it. *Ibid*, p53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p7.

⁷⁵ Some witnesses referred to as 'Dr' may have been male or female. For example, it is only apparent that Dr M A C Douglas-Drummond, Assistant Medical Officer of Health, Manchester, was a woman from reference to her as 'a medical woman.' *Ibid*, p172.

sanitary and care conditions in specific nursing homes.⁷⁶ One woman's evidence was apparently so sensitive that it was not even recorded; all we know is that she was 'Miss A (examined in private)' on 20 April 1926. Neither Wilkinson nor Philipson were present on that day; Miss A gave her evidence before six men.

This committee's recommendations that nursing homes should be registered and inspected were embodied in Mabel Philipson's private members' bill in 1927, supported by the government. The government bill file noted that Philipson was relying on one of her fellow committee members, Gerald Hurst, for advice. Another woman MP also had a direct influence on the bill; Nancy Astor, a Christian Scientist, successfully lobbied for an exemption for Christian Science nursing homes. She did so via the Ministry of Health rather than through Philipson – indeed Astor appeared not to have known that Philipson was involved. In one letter Astor remarked 'I am not quite sure which of the MPs is really responsible for it.'⁷⁷

Women MPs as acknowledged experts; Capital Punishment and Family Maintenance

The number of women MPs increased at the 1929 general election, and some were appointed to select committees according to their areas of expertise. In 1929 the House of Commons set up a select committee to look into capital punishment, following a debate in the House on 30 October. For the first time, a woman MP was put on a committee as an expert in an area which was not primarily a 'women's subject', although there were certainly gender aspects and women penal reformers took a lively interest in the issue.⁷⁸ Ethel Bentham, a Labour MP, medical doctor and Quaker, who supported the National Campaign for the Abolition of the Death Penalty,⁷⁹ played an active part in proceedings, attending all but one of the committee sittings, and asking questions of almost every witness. Her questions were wide-ranging and touched on all issues including the death penalty as a deterrent and as retribution. Her perspective as a doctor was evident as she was clearly interested in the state of health of those

⁷⁶ With one exception; 'Miss LM', a proprietor of a nursing home, was fiercely against inspection, 'Because I am English and I do not like that sort of thing.' Ibid, p231.

⁷⁷ TNA, MH 80/10, letter dated 15 Sep 1927.

⁷⁸ Anne Logan identifies the execution of Edith Thompson in 1923 as the catalyst that got capital punishment onto the Parliamentary agenda. She quotes Mrs Wintringham as arguing that capital punishment was a subject of especial interest to women, 'because their work is to bring life into the world, to tend life, to nurture it, to protect it and to see it grow in its different stages.' Anne Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice: A Historical Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp133-8.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p33.

who committed murders, referring to examples committed during what were afterwards recognised as epileptic fits, degrees of insanity and drunkenness.⁸⁰ Just one witness among 40 was a woman, Margery Fry from the Howard League for Penal Reform. She appeared alongside Labour political activist Denis Pritt, and they took turns in answering questions, although Pritt talked more than Fry. One committee member remarked at the end, 'I regret that Miss Fry has been kept a little in the background, in one way, because we had not really time to allow of a double answer to each question.'⁸¹

One issue the committee considered was whether women should be subject to the death penalty. All the committee members asked occasional questions on this, including Bentham.⁸² The committee noted that several witnesses who supported the death penalty for men were 'averse to its being applied to women, but, on being pressed, they could give no reason save sentiment, or that women have rarely committed first degree murders.' It concluded, 'if capital punishment is wrong for women, it is wrong for both sexes, and if equality of sex is to be established, "Sentiment" will insist that it can only be along the pathway of abolition.'⁸³ Their recommendation was that the death penalty should still apply to women on the same terms on which it applied to men.⁸⁴

Eleanor Rathbone, an acknowledged expert on family allowances, was a member of the Joint Committee on the Wills and Intestacies (Family Maintenance) Bill in 1931.⁸⁵ This Bill aimed to protect surviving spouses or children left without means of support following the deceased spouse's will or intestacy. At the commencement of proceedings, Rathbone put in a copy of the Bill with amendments the promoters were willing to make. The committee took this into consideration in arriving at their decision, although they recommended that legislation would not be justified. Rathbone did not succeed in having a bill passed on this subject until 1938.

⁸⁰ *Report from the Select Committee on Capital Punishment*. HC 15 (1930-31), p183, p319, pp506-509.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p459. Fry played an important role in the formation and development of the Howard League, and was a dominant force in it until the 1950s. Logan, *Feminism and Criminal Justice*, pp30-33.

⁸² *Ibid*, p60.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.xlvi.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.xcx. The committee recommended abolition of the death penalty for an experimental period of five years, but on a bare majority, and the six Conservative members withdrew in protest.

⁸⁵ *Joint Committee on the Wills and Intestacies (Family Maintenance) Bill*, HC 112 (1930-31).

The Shop Assistants Committee was appointed in 1929 and sat over two sessions considering proposals for limiting the hours of shop assistants and improving employment conditions. There was originally no women member and NUSEC sent a letter of protest to the government in May 1930.⁸⁶ This may have had a delayed effect, as Leah Manning was appointed, but not until a male member died in the following session, so her impact was limited.⁸⁷ The committee heard evidence from 87 witnesses, of whom nine were women.⁸⁸ It appears these nine were something of an afterthought: the chairman, Charles Buxton (Labour), asked a male witness whether it would be desirable to hear women witnesses.⁸⁹ Two women witnesses were MPs: Ethel Bentham gave evidence as a GP, to the effect that the work of a shop assistant was unhealthy but need not be so.⁹⁰ Marion Phillips gave evidence on behalf of the Joint Standing Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations.⁹¹ The Committee's conclusions drew attention to the long hours worked by women shop assistants, the effect of this on their health, and that the seats provided by law for women shop assistants were not used as this was seen as a sign of slackness by employers.⁹²

The International Dimension; the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform 1932-34

After the general election of 1931 there was an influx of Conservative women, some of whom had been elected unexpectedly in the National Government landslide. One of the most important select committees of this Parliament was the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, set up to consider the government's white paper on India. It was a very

⁸⁶ Women's Library, 2NSE/A/5/5/1. NUSEC Parliamentary Committee, 13 May 1930.

⁸⁷ Manning was appointed on 24 Mar 1931, after the death of Labour MP James Stewart on 17 Mar 1931. She had been elected as an MP only one month earlier.

⁸⁸ *Select Committee on Shop Assistants*, HC 176 (1929-30) and HC 148 (1930-31). The women witnesses included representatives on behalf of the Edinburgh and District Juvenile Organisations Committee, the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, the Committee on Wage-earning Children and the University of Liverpool Social Survey of Merseyside.

⁸⁹ Mr J R Leslie, General Secretary of the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, opined that yes, it would be very valuable. *Select Committee on Shop Assistants* (1929-30), p43.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p185. She also mentioned that her experience was largely with women rather than men.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p129.

⁹² *Select Committee on Shop Assistants* (1930-31), pp62-65.

large committee which sat over two sessions. As well as sixteen peers and sixteen MPs, there were twenty-seven delegates from the Indian States and British India.⁹³ There was one woman MP on the committee, the Conservative Mary Pickford. There was also one woman delegate, Begum Shah Nawaz, who was an assiduous attendee at early meetings, but does not appear in the records after 3 August 1933.

Pickford was a conscientious attendee from the start until her untimely death aged 49 on 6 March 1934, and one can only speculate as to how she must have found being the only women member on a committee with usually about fifty male members and delegates present. Sadly, she died before the committee reported.⁹⁴ The minutes of evidence show Pickford asking questions on many topics. She was particularly tenacious in questioning where women's rights such as enfranchisement were under discussion, and where male witnesses had not consulted women's organisations. On one occasion she queried, 'The ratio of women to men voters will be 1 woman to 15 men. Do you think that that is likely to give them an effective influence upon candidates and legislatures?' In reply Sir Mohammed Yakub insisted, 'Women have never suffered on account of men in the matter of legislation anywhere in India.'⁹⁵

The committee held more than seventy meetings, examining more than 120 witnesses, very few of whom were women. Eleanor Rathbone lobbied and gave evidence to the full committee,⁹⁶ as did five representatives from the Mahila Samiti Ladies' Association, the All India Women's Conference, the National Council of Women in India and the Women's Indian Association.⁹⁷ Representatives from the same bodies, plus Lady Layton and Ray Strachey as representatives of the British Commission for Indian Women's Franchise, also gave evidence to a sub-committee of this Committee, which consisted of seven members including Pickford.⁹⁸ The British Commission for Indian Women's Franchise put forward a memorandum listing priorities, which included literacy as a qualification for the franchise, increasing the ratio of

⁹³ *Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform* HC 112(1), HL 79(1), (1932-33).

⁹⁴ *Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform* HC 5, HL 6 (1933-34). 7 Mar 1934. The committee wrote to her relatives to record their sympathy and deep appreciation of her work. The last meeting Pickford attended was on 27 Feb 1934.

⁹⁵ *Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, (1932-33), pp1497-8. 1 Aug 1933.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 27 Jun and 17 Oct 1933.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 2 Aug 1933.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 26 and 29 Jul 1933.

women voters, providing for the inclusion of women in the Upper Chamber and the inclusion of women in any declaration of 'fundamental rights'.⁹⁹ Signatories to the memo included eleven of the 15 women MPs at that time.¹⁰⁰ The Committee's report would contribute to the Government of India Act 1935.

Select Committees in the mid-1930s

The number of women MPs decreased to seven after the 1935 general election. Irene Ward sat on the Joint Committee on Water Resources and Supplies 1935-1936. Although supply of water to rural households was an issue of concern to some women, this committee did not deal with this, concentrating on technicalities of water supply and the effect on mills, factories and industry. There were no women witnesses and no 'women's angle' discussed but Ward attended every meeting and contributed questions assiduously. By contrast, Cazalet was put on the Joint Committee on the London Government Bill in 1938-1939, but did not manage to attend any of its meetings and made no discernible contribution.¹⁰¹ She became Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Board of Education in June 1938, and married in June 1939, so it was a busy time for her in other ways.

The Second World War: Rebuilding the House of Commons

Unlike standing committees, select committees continued to be appointed throughout the Second World War. Following the bombing of the Palace of Westminster in 1941 which destroyed the Commons chamber, a Select Committee on the House of Commons (Rebuilding) was appointed in 1944 to make recommendations on the nature of the new chamber. Eleanor Rathbone was a member, attending most of the meetings and asking questions. One recurring point was whether to rebuild the old Ladies' Gallery, where female visitors to the Commons had to sit until 1918. All witnesses agreed that it had been a bad space,¹⁰² and that it was now

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp2262.

¹⁰⁰ The signatories were Astor, Iveagh, Cazalet, Copeland, Graves, Horsbrugh, Lloyd George, Rathbone, Shaw, Tate and Irene Ward. The ones who didn't sign were Atholl, Runge and Sarah Ward, plus Pickford herself (as she was on the committee it was addressed to).

¹⁰¹ Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: an account of women in the British Parliament, 1918-1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967), p126.

¹⁰² *Select Committee on the House of Commons (Rebuilding): Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index*, HC 109(1), (1943-44). For example, Mr E N de Normann; 'The trouble... always was that nobody could hear or see,' p10, p13.

'quite absurd' to segregate the sexes.¹⁰³ Rathbone made the point that it was a waste of accommodation. Other interventions by Rathbone which reflected her particular interests included the possibility of having cross-benches for independent MPs, and the need for more space for the Foreign and Dominion Press.¹⁰⁴

Gender on the agenda: the Select Committee on Equal Compensation

The select committee of most direct relevance to gender issues during the war was the Select Committee on Equal Compensation in 1942-43. The inequality in the levels of compensation for personal injury between men and women (because housewives were defined as not in gainful employment, and different levels set for the sexes who were in such employment) had been raised by women in Parliament back in October 1939,¹⁰⁵ although the select committee was not appointed until December 1942. Equal compensation was a personal cause of Conservative MP Mavis Tate, who chaired a committee of women's organisations dedicated to opposing the gender discrimination aspect of the Personal Injuries (Civilian) Scheme.¹⁰⁶

With five women in a membership of 15, for the first time the minutes of evidence of a select committee show an overall high level of questioning from women. These were Megan Lloyd George, Thelma Cazalet-Keir (active participants although less so than the other three), Edith Summerskill (outspoken on the subject of women doctors),¹⁰⁷ Agnes Hardie and Tate (both extremely knowledgeable on the subject and active in questioning). There were twelve women witnesses from campaigning organisations and the armed services,¹⁰⁸ all sympathetic to equal compensation, among 19 witnesses. The committee was particularly interested in the

¹⁰³ Ibid, Mr Speaker, p20; Serjeant-at-Arms, p40.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p42, p59, p113.

¹⁰⁵ HC Deb 24 Oct 1939 vol 352 cc1253-323. Jennie Adamson, seconded by Edith Summerskill. Also considered in the Commons debate on Woman Power, HC Deb 20 March 1941 vol 370 cc315-400, and brought up by Tate and Summerskill in May 1941. HC Deb 1 May 1941 vol 371 cc635-67.

¹⁰⁶ Tate also later chaired its successor, the Equal Pay Campaign Committee. Martin Pugh, 'Tate, Mavis Constance (1893–1947)', *ODNB*.

¹⁰⁷ Doctors were repeatedly referred to because their profession offered a unique example of equal pay, pensions and compensation in the Services. Summerskill argued this was because doctors were better organised than other professions. *Select Committee on Equal Compensation: Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index relating to the Report of the Committee*, HC 53, (1942-43), p55.

¹⁰⁸ See Appendix 6 for full list.

evidence from the British Federation of Business and Professional Women, who argued for a flat rate of compensation for both sexes, unrelated to earnings, despite representing highly paid professional women.¹⁰⁹

By contrast, the male witnesses generally advocated compensation related to earnings and/or gender, with women getting less. The problem of compensating women without earnings made that difficult. Sir Alan Barlow from the Treasury stated that the only part of the social structure in which gender was not already built into the system was Old Age Pensions, and advanced the opinion that if pensions were introduced today rather than in 1908 there would be sex differentiation. John McGovern asked, 'Was the Treasury more advanced thirty-four years ago?'¹¹⁰ Also during questioning, Sir Alexander Cunnison from the Ministry of Pensions argued that a housewife who had lost both her arms and was fitted with artificial limbs could do her duties to 'a considerable extent', at which the committee was incredulous:

Miss Lloyd George: ...What sort of household duties could she carry out having lost both arms?

Sir Alexander Cunnison: I am not enough of an expert in household work to say that, but I think there are quite a considerable number of things that the woman normally does in the house that she could do.

Miss Lloyd George: Could she cook? Could she wash?

Sir Alexander Cunnison: I should have thought she probably could.

...Mr Ridley: I am a thoroughly domesticated animal and I would not like to find myself upstairs trying to make a bed, I being fixed with a potato peeling apparatus. I think rehabilitation to the ordinary housewife is impossible.¹¹¹

The committee reported in favour of equal compensation and the government accepted their recommendations.¹¹² This victory for Mavis Tate and her colleagues was a great achievement,

¹⁰⁹ Caroline Haslett, Director of the Electrical Association for Women, remarked, 'I live in an atmosphere of equality with men; I have learned to expect it, and indeed, I get it from my male colleagues, and have had it for many years.' *Select Committee on Equal Compensation*, p141.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p98 and p103. Barlow, 'shared the traditional Treasury distaste for public expenditure.' Rodney Lowe, 'Barlow, Sir (James) Alan Noel, second baronet (1881–1968)', *ODNB*.

¹¹¹ *Select Committee on Equal Compensation*, p23. Mr Ridley was George Ridley (Labour).

¹¹² HC Deb 7 Apr 1943 vol 388 cc624-6.

but it would not have been possible without cross-party support from seven of the ten men on the committee, including two independent-minded Conservatives (Robert Morgan and the Chairman, Henry Willink).¹¹³

The Select Committee on National Expenditure

By far the largest and most important wartime committee was the National Expenditure Committee (NEC). This was appointed every session from 1939/40 to 1944/45:

to examine the current expenditure defrayed out of moneys provided by Parliament for the Defence Services, for Civil Defence, and for other services directly connected with the war, and to report what, if any, economies consistent with the execution of the policy decided by the Government may be effected therein.

Under the chairmanship of Sir John Wardlaw-Milne (Conservative), initially with 28 members and later increased to 32, the NEC was an enormous select committee which carried out most of its investigation in sub-committees. A co-ordinating sub-committee allocated subjects and oversaw the work of the other sub-committees. The nature of the sub-committees changed over time, initially shadowing each of the armed services and government departments, but later switching to a subject-based approach. The NEC published one hundred reports over its six sessions. Reflecting the contribution of women to the war effort, the NEC had two women MPs among its membership; Lady Davidson during the entire period 1939-1945, plus Ellen Wilkinson in the 1939/40 session, and (after Wilkinson's appointment to government) Irene Ward from 1940/41 to 1944/45.

The NEC appears to be little studied by historians, which is surprising given its size, the range of subjects it covered, and that it was one of the principal ways in which Parliament scrutinised government during the Second World War.¹¹⁴ It has similarly been given little weight when evaluating the women MPs involved. Lady Davidson's entry in the *ODNB* simply says, 'She was the only woman MP to be a member of the national expenditure committee throughout the

¹¹³ The other men on the committee supportive of equal compensation were David Grenfell, George Ridley (both Labour), John McGovern (ILP), Leslie Burgin (National Liberal) and Vernon Bartlett (independent). The three opposing Conservatives were Maurice Hely-Hutchinson, Charles MacAndrew and Lambert Ward. *Select Committee on Equal Compensation: Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index relating to the Report of the Committee*, HC 53, (1942-43), p.xvii-xxvii.

¹¹⁴ Although it is referred to in histories of the select committee system in passing, I can find no specific study of it.

Second World War',¹¹⁵ and refers in the same way to her membership of the Kitchen Committee, as if managing the finances of the Commons' kitchen was of comparable importance and difficulty to auditing the nation in wartime. Irene Ward's *ODNB* entry says, rather vaguely, 'During the Second World War she was concerned with issues of women's employment and equal pay,' and mentions her chairmanship of the Woman Power Committee, but not the NEC.¹¹⁶ The question must therefore be asked; just how important were Davidson and Ward to the NEC?

Their most obvious contribution was two reports on aspects of women's experience of the war, 'Medical Services of the WRNS, ATS and WAAF', and 'Health and Welfare of Women in War Factories'.¹¹⁷ These were commissioned by the Fighting Services sub-committee in 1942, which set up Davidson and Ward as their own ad-hoc sub-committee. It was explained by Sir Ralph Glyn at the co-ordinating sub-committee, 'I think it is quite obvious that the evidence we want to get will not be forthcoming if a lot of men are sitting round the table.'¹¹⁸ The Chairman declared at the Full committee, 'It is rather a good idea, I think.'¹¹⁹

The evidence taken by Davidson and Ward shows them questioning top military health experts on wide-ranging issues including pregnancy and venereal disease, problems in the armed services resulting from love affairs, lavatory shortages, prostitutes, shortage of sanitary towels (and the undesirability of 'Tampax' for unmarried girls) and the need for hairdressers.¹²⁰ Their report was well-received by both the Fighting Services sub-committee and the full NEC. An additional secret memorandum about illegitimate babies and the return of their mothers to

¹¹⁵ Elliot of Harwood, 'Davidson, (Frances) Joan, Viscountess Davidson and Baroness Northchurch (1894–1985)', *ODNB*.

¹¹⁶ Helen Langley, 'Ward, Irene Mary Bewick, Baroness Ward of North Tyneside (1895–1980)', *ODNB*.

¹¹⁷ *Select Committee on National Expenditure, 6th report*, HC 72, (1941–42) and *Select Committee on National Expenditure, 3rd report*, HC 19, (1942–43).

¹¹⁸ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AA/33 - Co-ord 4, 21 Jan 1942. Sir Ralph Glyn (Conservative), Chairman of Fighting Services.

¹¹⁹ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/062 - Full 4, 22 Jan 1942. Sir John Wardlaw-Milne.

¹²⁰ A ditty composed by an anonymous NEC Clerk in 1942 summing up the 21 reports of the session referred to this one as follows: '*The Sixth (or Woman's Own) dealt with all things more or less/From Hairdressing to Babies, and/or Occupational Stress.*' PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/64.

service was (after much discussion) communicated separately by Wardlaw-Milne to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.¹²¹

Following this success and many congratulations, Davidson and Ward were then given the task of investigating the health of women in factories. Remarks in the Fighting Services sub-committee discussion included, 'Our women members have put their finger on to a good many weak spots which could be remedied on these lines in all the factories in the country.'¹²² It was initially suggested that the two women attach themselves to the visits of the Production sub-committee to avoid any duplication of work. The women strongly resisted this, Ward explaining:

... when I have been with the Production sub-committee... it is with the greatest possible difficulty...that I see the women's personnel officers or the medical people... I have always tried to slip away and have a word with the nurses or with the Medical Officers who... in big Royal Ordnance Factories, are nearly always women.¹²³

Lady Davidson declared, 'We are very clear in our minds as to how we are going to do it.' It was agreed they would manage their own enquiry.

However, their factories report was much more controversial than their medical services report. When presented, there was much complaint about length, structure, coverage, lack of time for consideration and whether the NEC could endorse it.¹²⁴ Tempers were frayed and it was referred to the co-ordinating sub-committee for re-drafting. There, Sir Arnold Gridley

¹²¹ Miss Musson from the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child wrote to the Clerk, Miss Midwinter, 'it is very cheering to my Committee and other friends in my work, as well as myself, to feel that we have such real and practical sympathisers on your committee.' Letter dated 7 June 1942, with the memo in PA, HL/PO/CL/CO/AA/AN/1/2. Other correspondence about it in PA, HL/PO/CL/CO/AA/AN/1/6. The discussion in the NEC as to what to do with it is in PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/062 – Full 20, 16 Jul 1942.

¹²² PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AI/1/18 – Fighting Services 8, 17 Mar 1942.

¹²³ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AA/33 - Co-ord 11 22 Apr 1942. In one example of this, following questioning by Ward at a Supply sub-committee evidence session at ROF Aycliffe, which employed 16,000 women, in 1941, the sub-committee saw an additional unscheduled witness, Miss R N Batty, the Grade I Women's Labour Officer. They asked her about women workers and their pay, medical care, and attitudes from management. PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AF/1/22 Supply 54, 5 Sep 1941.

¹²⁴ The report was drafted in the 1941/42 session, but held over until the 1942/43 session. The ditty referred to above included as its final lines, '(A report on Women's Welfare saying much that's plainly true/Is now considered missing as its long been overdue.)' PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/64.

(Conservative) said he would agree with every word in peacetime but did not think it was relevant in wartime, when their remit was national expenditure. The report went into details which many of the men regarded as trivial: for example, the need to warm up the midday meal for night-shift workers¹²⁵ and the need for colourful decoration in rest rooms to provide a restful atmosphere. Davidson argued that these details were 'perhaps beneath the average man but not too small for us to inquire into',¹²⁶ and that these apparently small issues were giving women a great deal of trouble and causing absenteeism. There was strong support from Herbert Williams (Conservative):

The two ladies have gone into these irritants with meticulous detail, and have produced a report which men would not have produced. I think we must be very careful not to be masculinists on this, if I may use a phrase we do not very often hear.¹²⁷

At the full NEC, Sir Ernest Bennett moved to withdraw the report, as 'I do not think it is in touch with the general series of our excellent Reports.'¹²⁸ Bennett also wrote privately to the Chairman:

Such arguments as that an increased supply of Soap and Towels... are really relevant to the *raison d'être* of the Committee, because cleaner hands and faces will materially increase production, are not very convincing.¹²⁹

However, by now a lot of time and effort had gone into the report and it was felt there had to be a result. After another round of amendments the report was finalised. Ward and Davidson were not asked to make another special inquiry.

They nevertheless played a full part in the general work of the NEC before, during, and after their women's inquiries. Davidson was on the Navy sub-committee in 1939/40 and 1940/4; the co-ordinating sub-committee in 1941/2, Departmental Inquiries (B) in 1942/3, and sub-

¹²⁵ Sir Ernest Bennett (Nat Labour) grumbled, 'I cannot see really why a recommendation of this sort comes in a Report on National Expenditure. It is a thing more fit for Mrs Beeton's cookery book.' PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/078 Full 3, 17 Dec 1942.

¹²⁶ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AA/1/42 – Co-ord 1, 9 Dec 1942.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/078 – Full 3, 17 Dec 1942.

¹²⁹ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/82, Sir Ernest Bennett to Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, 9 Dec 1942.

committee 'C' in 1943/4 and 1944/5. Ward was on the Supply sub-committee in 1940/1, Production & Supply in 1941/2, Special Inquiries in 1942/3, and sub-committees 'E' and 'B' in 1943/4 and 1944/5. Ellen Wilkinson also sat on Supply in 1939/40. In these roles they took evidence and contributed to reports on a wide variety of topics. Davidson and Ward went on all the many visits arranged for the NEC, along with the men.¹³⁰ Over the years, the subjects investigated were as diverse as flax, fire guards, central ordnance depots,¹³¹ tinplate supplies, building programmes, American mining machinery,¹³² British expenditure in India, the activities of the Ministry of Information, road haulage,¹³³ the waste of caustic soda, and the reconversion of industry after the war.¹³⁴ The overwhelming majority of witnesses questioned on all subjects were men, but there is no hint in the transcripts of evidence that Davidson and Ward felt any inhibition about asking questions and demanding answers. Nor is there any hint that their male committee colleagues regarded them as less able. Basil Drennan was Clerk to the Navy sub-committee while Davidson was a member; his detailed and candid letters to his parents show no opposition to a woman being among the MPs he had to look after.¹³⁵ Herbert Williams, Chairman of Sub-committee E in 1944, described his sub-committee during an investigation on advanced preparation of housing sites thus:

Mr Bossom is a very distinguished architect, I am a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Miss Ward is of a very inquiring turn of mind, to say the least of it, and Dr Russell Thomas had a scientific training.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ At one point the Navy sub-committee was at Salisbury Plain watching a demonstration with live ammunition. The Clerk Basil Drennan recorded, 'Lady Davidson was in great form. She said, "I don't want to seem fussy, but was that a bullet that went past my head just now?"' DRE/A/1/17, letter dated 5 Jun 1942.

¹³¹ Special Inquiries sub-committee, 1942/43.

¹³² Sub-committee E, 1943/44.

¹³³ Sub-committee C, 1944/45.

¹³⁴ Sub-committee B, 1944/45.

¹³⁵ He recorded delight as receiving praise from her at one point. 'Lady Davidson said she much preferred my notes as "one felt there was a brain behind them" at which she made a nod and a little grimace at me. There must have been such a rush of blood to me [sic] head that the rest of me got a chill.' PA, DRE/A/1/16, letter dated 18 May 1941.

¹³⁶ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AS /1/54 – sub-committee E 19, 20 Jul 1944.

Sometimes Davidson and Ward addressed an issue of specific relevance to women, asking questions which might not have been asked by an exclusively male sub-committee. For example during inquiries into the supply of milk, eggs and other household necessities, Davidson took a particular interest in children's clothes.¹³⁷ Lack of equal pay was a recurring theme. During evidence taken at Chatham Dockyard in June 1941, Davidson queried the flat rate of 30 shillings a week paid to all women workers, including those employed in skilled engineering work:

Lady Davidson: They are being paid the same rate as the scrubbers [i.e. cleaners], and nobody pays any attention to it...

A. [Admiral Danby] It is a question which is being fought out between the Trade Union, the Admiralty and the Treasury.

Lady Davidson: And the result is nil so far.

...Chairman [Sir Percy Harris, Liberal]: These women doing that very skilled work are getting the same rate as a cleaner?

A. [Admiral Danby] Yes, that is the position at the moment.

Chairman: It would be much better to be a cleaner, with no responsibility.¹³⁸

During a Fighting Services sub-committee meeting in January 1942, memoranda from the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry on women's employment were considered, and Davidson and Ward were present. Issues included rates of pay, allowances, substitution for men, and civilians employed on the same work as women. At one point they discovered that WAAF officers were paid approximately two-thirds of RAF rates:

Davidson: What is the basis of this two-thirds?

Ward: The Prime Minister says that a woman is worth four-fifths of a man.

Davidson: I doubt if they are using five women to replace four men....In the Naval Establishments you will find the women are doing the same work as the men... It is very unreasonable.

¹³⁷ Davidson said she had received many complaints about this and was concerned, being a mother herself. PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AR/1/10-11 - Departmental Services (B) 21, 5 Aug 1943.

¹³⁸ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AE/1/16 - Navy 17, 5 Jun 1941.

...Ward: It is monstrous to pay a male messenger 68/- and a woman 43/-, because they must do roughly the same work, must they not?

Davidson: Look at the average weekly addition for overtime: 22/2 as compared with 14/-

Sir Assheton Pownall (Conservative): It is not even two-thirds.¹³⁹

Davidson in particular was extremely conscientious about her NEC work, managing to attend 60 of the 62 Navy sub-committee meetings in 1939/40, and 42 of the 46 Navy sub-committee meetings in 1940/41, a staggering achievement. Her attendance falls in the later war years, due to ill-health and other work, but undoubtedly she placed very great importance on the NEC.¹⁴⁰ Ward's attendances were affected by other commitments, including travel abroad on behalf of the Ministry of Information in 1943-44,¹⁴¹ but she too was scrupulous in participating as fully as she was able. Both Ward and Davidson were occasionally included in meetings of sub-committees of which they were not members, if they expressed an interest in a topic.¹⁴² As members of NEC, they had considerably more clout when asking questions of government than the average MP.¹⁴³

Other Parliamentary Committees: the Ecclesiastical Committee

Parliament had a number of other committees which are not readily categorised as select committees or standing committees. A new committee came into existence from 1933, the Parliamentary Panel under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Acts 1899-1933. Florence Horsbrugh sat on this committee in each session from 1935-36 to the Second World

¹³⁹ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AI/1/18 – Fighting Services 3, 13 Jan 1942. The memos are PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AI/1/2, 3, 4.

¹⁴⁰ There are letters of apology for absence. PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/94.

¹⁴¹ Langley, 'Ward', *ODNB*.

¹⁴² Davidson wrote from her sickbed in 1945 requesting that either she or Ward, or both, could be put on a proposed investigation into 'Release, training and rehabilitation of Service Personnel'. Davidson to Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, 1 Feb 1945. The inquiry was allocated to sub-committee A and Ward was duly added to its membership for the duration of that enquiry; Diver to Ward, 13 Apr 1945. PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/1/124.

¹⁴³ For example, when Ward wanted to ask the Treasury about (lack of) tropical kit for women's services in June 1945, she deliberately asked via the NEC Committee Clerk. PA, HC/CL/AA/1/124.

War. Unfortunately no record of proceedings survives and the extent of her contribution cannot be ascertained.

Another oddity was the Ecclesiastical Committee, a statutory Committee appointed under the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919, which considered Church Measures. Its membership was half Lords and half Commons, appointed for the duration of a Parliament. Perhaps unexpectedly, the Ecclesiastical Committee had a woman member as early as 1929, when Edith Picton-Turbervill was appointed.¹⁴⁴ In her memoirs she says that she was in 'great awe' at the honour and made a contribution at her first meeting. 'Lord Clarendon suggested passing the Pluralities Measure without comment. Greatly daring, I asked if it did not interfere with the right of appeal to the Privy Council—a noble lord said it did, and it was not passed.'¹⁴⁵ As a committee member, she took a turn presenting Church Measures to the Commons. Although these were taken late in the evening and not debated for long, she had to prepare for any opposition. Picton-Turbervill found herself regarded as an ecclesiastical expert and referred to a number of conversations with the Prime Minister on the subject, including one occasion where 'he laughingly said that there was no vacant ecclesiastical post for which I had not my nominee ready!'¹⁴⁶

Finally, women may occasionally have been invisibly present at select committee meetings in supporting roles. In 1942 the Equal Compensation Committee took evidence from Sir Eric B Speed, Joint Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the War Office, accompanied by a lady, 'Miss Applebey, my Secretary; she is not here officially at all.'¹⁴⁷ Some of the committee members had their own private secretarial staff, who would have assisted with their select committee work.¹⁴⁸ And the NEC itself was notable in having women among its staff: Kay

¹⁴⁴ Picton-Turbervill was known for her religious activism, having campaigned for wider lay involvement with the Church and the ordination of women. Susan Pedersen, 'Turbervill, Edith Picton- (1872–1960)', *ODNB*.

¹⁴⁵ Edith Picton-Turbervill, *Life is Good: an autobiography* (Frederick Muller Ltd, 1939), p188. Lord Clarendon was the 6th Earl of Clarendon (Conservative).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p190.

¹⁴⁷ *Select Committee on Equal Compensation*, p51.

¹⁴⁸ For example Sir Ralph Glyn employed Florence Carson, who signed the Official Secrets Act in 1939. She had been an examiner in Postal Censorship 1915-19 and then a supervisor at the Enemy Debts department until her marriage in 1921. PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AA/1/1.

Midwinter, the first female House of Commons Clerk, played a full role alongside her male colleagues in administering the work of the committee.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

Returning to the quotation with which we began, the Women's Electoral Campaign leaflet issued after the Second World War declared that the committee service of the women MPs 'made their mark on the law-making of the last 30 years in a degree entirely out of proportion to their numbers.' It can now be considered to what extent this was true with regard to select committee service.

It is certainly true that the women MPs were greatly outnumbered by their male colleagues but despite their small numbers, their participation on select committees shows much diligence and useful input in a number of areas. The attendance figures are generally good and comparable to male averages. Although the contribution of those who did participate is sometimes opaque or negligible, such as Mabel Philipson on the Kitchen Committee and Thelma Cazalet on the London Local Government Committee, there are examples of active and solid contributions to the work of committees. These include Ellen Wilkinson on the Kitchen Committee, Ethel Bentham on the Capital Punishment Committee and Mary Pickford on the Indian Constitutional Committee. Mavis Tate and her female colleagues on the Equal Compensation Committee played important roles in its investigation and could be proud of their impact. Joan Davidson and Irene Ward were not only very solid members of the National Expenditure Committee generally but made a unique and measurable contribution with their reports into women in the armed forces and in factories.

It is clear that women MPs who were placed on select committees were initially mostly deliberately put on committees which were seen to have a 'women's interest', either explicitly (children's guardianship, nationality of married women, nursing), or according to a perception of women's interest being in the domestic sphere (the Kitchen Committee). This marginalisation seemed to diminish during the 1930s, with women being placed on committees dealing with broader topics such as water resources. Nevertheless, no women MPs were put on six of the eight core sessional committees, or on the established select committees on public finance (the Public Accounts Committee and the Estimates Committee).

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 7.

It is difficult to say that women MPs made their mark 'entirely out of proportion to their numbers'. Many women MPs in this period never sat on a select committee. This includes some long-standing women members such as the Duchess of Atholl, and notable Labour MPs such as Susan Lawrence and Margaret Bondfield. Of course, many male MPs also never sat on a select committee; in a period with more than 600 MPs in the Commons, numbers of men on select committees varied from a high of 212 in 1920 to a low of 113 in 1934-35. Women MPs participation in select committees is therefore more proportionate than not.

It is perhaps the case that some women MPs who did not participate so much in other areas of Parliamentary activity, such as debate, contributed more to select committees. It is notable that Brian Harrison's analysis of the early women MPs' contribution to debates in the chamber mentions a 'top eight' list of contributors: Astor, Atholl, Bondfield, Horsbrugh, Lawrence, Lloyd George, Rathbone and Wilkinson.¹⁵⁰ This list is not dissimilar to contributors to standing committees, but is wholly different from that to select committees; of the eight, only Astor, Rathbone and Wilkinson sat on even one select committee and Astor only on one. By contrast, Harrison mentions 'reluctant speakers' in Parliament, such as Runge and Shaw,¹⁵¹ both of whom participated in select committees. Mary Philipson's biographer says that, despite being an actor, she never overcame her dislike of speaking in the House of Commons;¹⁵² but she too participated in select committee work.

Perhaps the very nature of select committee work, the smaller group of people involved, the concentration on the fine detail of issues, gathering evidence and questioning witnesses, was more suited to some of these women than the avowedly masculine cut and thrust debate of the House of Commons chamber and (to a lesser extent) of standing committees. This analysis of select committee participation contributes to a more rounded view of participation of women in Parliament, and brings to the fore the contributions of female MPs such as Mary Pickford, Ethel Bentham and Lady Davidson who are often overlooked.

¹⁵⁰ The women MPs who held ministerial office spoke more because of their official capacity, as in standing committees.

¹⁵¹ Brian Harrison, 'Women in a men's house: the women MPs, 1919-1945', *Historical Journal* 29(3) 1986, p647.

¹⁵² John Sleight, *Women on the march: the story of the struggle for political power and equality for women in the north-east from 1920 to 1970, told through the lives of seven remarkable women* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: J Sleight, 1986), p53.

Chapter Seven

'The woman who can do this job has not yet been born':¹ Women Staff in Parliament, c.1900-1945

On 2 April 1911 the suffragette Emily Wilding Davison hid in the crypt chapel in the Houses of Parliament, so she could record her presence in Parliament on census night.² Part of a national effort by suffragette organisations to organise a mass disruption of the census,³ it was newsworthy at the time, and, today, a plaque marks the broom cupboard where she hid.

It is less well known that Davison was by no means the only woman in Parliament that night. There was a host of women living in the Palace of Westminster in this period and up to the Second World War. In addition to Davison, sixty-five women were resident on census night in 1911. The census gives a snapshot of some 14 households.⁴ These ranged from the extensive residence of the Speaker of the House of Commons to a single person household occupied by the Housekeeper of the House of Lords.⁵ Nor was the picture in 1911 unusual. The 1901 census shows a very similar picture, with sixty women living in the Palace of Westminster. The returns are less detailed in 1901, and not completed by the householder as in 1911; nevertheless there is enough information to enable a comparison with 1911. Tables 7.1 and 7.2 give a complete summary of households in Parliament in 1901 and 1911, in order of most to least women present.

¹ *Report from House of Commons Select Committee on Publications and Debates*, HC244 (1919), p27. Referring to the job of Hansard reporters.

² Her census form is signed by P E Ridge, Clerk of Works, Houses of Parliament, and it noted she was 'Found hiding in Crypt of Westminster Hall.' All census information and birth, marriage & death data taken from <<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/>>

³ Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford, "'Women do not count, neither shall they be counted': Suffrage, Citizenship and the Battle for the 1911 Census," pp98-127 in *History Workshop Journal* 71(1), 2011. Unlike some suffragettes, Davison was not attempting to boycott or evade the census, but to use her 'residence' on census night to make a more general claim for equal political rights with men.

⁴ The Palace is in the District of St George, the sub-district of St Margaret & St John, and then split between two census enumeration districts reflecting parish boundaries; no 24 with nine households, and no 1 with another five households.

⁵ These households are only those physically within the Palace of Westminster, and described as House of Lords, House of Commons, or Palace of Westminster on the census form. It does not include nearby streets where Parliament had property where other Parliamentary staff may have lived, such as Old Palace Yard.

Householder	Women family	Women Servants	Men
Henry D Erskine, Serjeant-at-Arms	Wife, daughter (age 25, single, no occupation)	8 female servants (aged 18-37)	Son (Assistant Serjeant), grandson age 3, 2 male servants
Charles F King, Manager, Refreshment Dept, House of Commons	Wife, daughter (7)	8 female servants (15-32)	None
William C Gully, Speaker of the House of Commons	Wife, daughter (24, no occupation)	7 female servants (17-59)	Son (Secretary to Speaker), 5 male servants
Archibald Milman, Clerk of the House of Commons [not present]	Wife, 4 daughters (aged 15-28, single, no occupation)	5 female servants (18-39)	2 male servants
John K Williams, Resident Superintendant, Lords	Wife, four daughters (oldest aged 21 & a bank clerk)	1 female servant (22)	Son
William Aggas , Refreshment Caterer in the Lords (widower, aged 75)	3 daughters (40, Housekeeper at House; 34, Barmaid at House; 27, typist)	1 female servant (22)	1 son, 1 male servant
Samuel Harris, Office Keeper, Commons	Wife, two daughters (24, Private Secretary, and 20, no occupation)	None	None
Henry Bullock, Office Keeper, Commons	Wife, daughter (14)	None	Son, 1 male servant
William Bowden, Foreman Electrical Engineer, Lords	Wife, daughter (22)	None	2 sons
John Jalfreeman, Mechanical Engineer, Lords	Wife	1 female servant (30)	
William Harvey, Office Keeper, Commons	Wife	None	2 sons

Table 7.1 Households in the Houses of Parliament, 1901 Census

Householder	Women family	Women Servants	Men
Courtenay Peregrine Ilbert, Clerk of the House of Commons	Wife, daughter (20, single, no occupation)	7 female servants (aged 18-41), plus a female sick nurse	1 male servant
James William Lowther, the Speaker	Wife	8 female servants (16-72)	Son, 6 male servants
Henry John Lowndes Graham, Clerk of the Parliaments	Wife	6 female servants (21-38)	3 male servants
Henry David Erskine, Serjeant at Arms	Wife, daughter (35, single, no occupation)	7 female servants (17-40)	Son, 3 male servants
Thomas Dacre Butler, Secretary to Lord Great Chamberlain	Wife, 2 daughters (22 & 24, single, no occupation)	5 female servants (20 to 68)	2 male servants
C F King, Manager of Commons Refreshment Department [not present]	None	7 female servants (15-43)	None
Francis Russell Gossett, Deputy Serjeant at Arms	Wife	3 female servants (23-46)	Visitor
William Bradshaw, resident engineer in the House of Lords	Wife	2 female servants (18 and 26), the latter a nurse for the children	Two infant sons
William Casbon, Caterer in the House of Lords	Wife	2 female servants (24 and 26)	None
William Bowden, Electrical Engineer	Wife , daughter (22, typist)	None	2 sons
George Canter, resident Turncock	Wife, daughter (16, Stock Room Girl)	None	Brother
Henry Bullock, Office Keeper	Wife	None	Son
Miss Amelia Blimmes de Laney, Housekeeper, House of Lords	None	None	None
Thomas Whitehead, Resident Superintendent, Lords	None	None	None

Table 7.2 Households in the Houses of Parliament, 1911 Census⁶

⁶ Mis-spellings on the census transcript include 'Lourdes' for Lowndes; 'President' for Resident; 'Furncock' for Turncock; 'de Laccey' for de Laney.

This data shows that, as well as women employed by Parliament, there were many women living and working in private households in the Houses of Parliament. They are worth a brief consideration, partly because domestic service employed the largest numbers of women of any labour market sector in Britain in this period;⁷ partly to shed light on the kinds of women living in such an unusual building, and also because the line between staff working for Parliament and staff working for officials of Parliament could be blurred.⁸ There are similar demographics in 1901 and 1911, most households including wives, daughters and female servants. The largest number of women were to be found in the households of the Serjeant at Arms in 1901 and the Clerk of the House of Commons in 1911, with ten women present in each case, a mixture of family and servants. The daughters in these larger, grander households were uniformly single and without occupation. Other, humbler, households had considerably fewer servants, perhaps just one general domestic; such single or two servant situations were typical of working and middle class homes which were the majority of servant-keeping households.⁹ Some altogether more modest households, such as Bowden's and Canter's, had no servants and the single daughters of the household were employed. Almost all the women servants were single, with a few widows. None were listed as married in 1901, and just two in 1911; married women would have been unlikely to live in. Few householders were the same in both 1901 and 1911, so it is difficult to trace continuity among the female servants.¹⁰ Henry D Erskine, the Serjeant-at-Arms, had eight female servants in 1901 and seven in 1911, but none of those from 1901 were there ten years later - consistent with a generally high turnover of servants. Although the census returns date from early in the century, the situation would have been very similar up to the Second World War; almost exactly the same households were present in Parliament in 1937.¹¹

⁷ Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place; Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p1, p13. Domestic service employed around 24% of women in work and about 8% of the entire workforce.

⁸ Until the early 19th century, most staff in Parliament were employed by officials who paid them out of their own allowances or from fees received for work done. O C Williams, *The clerical organization of the House of Commons, 1661-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

⁹ Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p5.

¹⁰ There is one household absent in 1901 which would normally have been there; Henry Graham was Clerk of the Parliaments in 1901 and 1911, but he and his wife were not present on census night 1901 (they were registered as visitors in a house at Chertsey), and their servants not recorded either.

¹¹ The only major differences from 1911 was that the Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the House had departed by 1937. HC Deb 20 Dec 1937 vol 330 c1593.

The information about residences provides small, fascinating glimpses into the lives of women living in the Houses of Parliament. It is the women who worked for the administration, however, who are of primary interest when evaluating Parliament as a place of work. Curiously, consideration of how 'woman- friendly' a workplace Parliament is for MPs has never been extended to staff. The role of women cooks and maids in Parliament has never been researched, while female administrative staff in the Lords and wartime women clerks in the Commons have been completely forgotten. They appear in senior staff lists of their day, but have been omitted from historical lists,¹² permitting a lazy, ahistorical assumption in Parliament today that women did not work there until the 1960s or later. The fact that some sixty-five women lived in the Houses of Parliament in 1911, many working there, is greeted with astonishment.

This chapter will investigate women who worked for Parliament in the first half of the twentieth century, including cleaning staff, kitchen staff, typists, secretaries, press and Hansard reporters, library staff, Clerks, and women in other executive and professional roles. It will place Parliament as a workplace for women alongside studies of sectors elsewhere and will allow for a more holistic view of Parliament's culture and environment.

The small matter of a housemaid's bed: the House of Lords Housekeeper and her furniture

The first record of a woman being employed by the Parliamentary administration dates from 1761. A book of appointments by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod shows that the House of Lords employed a 'Necessary Woman'.¹³ A woman was also employed as a Fire Maker from 1768.¹⁴

¹² They appear in contemporary directories such as *Dod's Parliamentary Companion and Imperial Kalendar*, but not in W R McKay, *Clerks in the House of Commons, 1363-1989: a biographical list* (HMSO, 1989).

¹³ Her name was Mary Phillips. She was followed on her death in 1785 by Mary Rawlins, and on Rawlins' death in 1799 by Luzetta Wray. PA, HL/PO/JO/10/5/86. A 'Necessary Woman' was a domestic servant employed to 'do the necessary' jobs such as emptying chamber pots. Necessary women were employed across government departments including the Treasury, Admiralty and Board of Trade in the late 17th and 18th centuries. J C Sainty, *Office Holders in Modern Britain* lists at <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>> accessed 12 July 2012.

¹⁴ Her name was Sarah Matthews. She was followed by Annette Scheeme in 1810. PA, HL/PO/JO/10/5/86.

Even before this date, however, there was a woman House of Lords Housekeeper, but she was a Crown appointment rather than a Parliamentary one.¹⁵ The post of Housekeeper was re-established as a Parliamentary appointment in 1847.¹⁶ In 1901, the House of Lords Housekeeper was Jessie Aggas, living in the household of her father William Aggas. In 1911, Amelia de Laney was the only female head of household in the Palace of Westminster, and she duly filled out and signed her own census form. It shows that she was 62 years old, living in four rooms, and under her birthplace she has written, 'Not sure but I think in London.' Her occupation is clearly given as, 'Housekeeper, House of Lords'. This information is of particular interest as the residential Housekeeper post was supposedly abolished in 1896. Following a report recommending savings in House of Lords staffing,¹⁷ and criticisms made in the Commons,¹⁸ the post had been replaced by a Principal Housemaid who was not supposed to live in.¹⁹ It seems, however, that the House of Lords continued to regard the Principal Housemaid as their 'Housekeeper', and it is not clear that she ever moved out. Possibly the situation was fudged as Jessie Aggas was able to live in the household of her father, Caterer for the House, rather than needing rooms of her own. The domestic arrangements changed in 1902 when it was argued by the Lord Great Chamberlain that the Principal Housemaid was needed on the premises early and late, and the Lords Offices Committee agreed she should live in.²⁰ No names are mentioned, but it is a reasonable surmise that the situation became an

¹⁵ J C Sainty, 'The Office of Housekeeper in the House of Lords,' pp256-260 in *Parliamentary History* 27(2): 2008. The post was a sinecure, carrying not only responsibility for the custody of the House of Lords area in the Palace of Westminster, but also the right to accommodation and to let out rooms in the vicinity. A woman was first appointed in 1690, Anne Wynard.

¹⁶ Appointed by the Lord Great Chamberlain. The first was Jane Julia Bennet, previously the deputy housekeeper.

¹⁷ *Second report from the Select Committee on the Office of the Clerk of the Parliaments and Office of Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod*, HL 340 (1889).

¹⁸ Dr Charles Tanner (Irish Nationalist) MP said in 1895, 'He understood the housekeeper was an excellent lady in every sense of the word, that she had nothing to do, and a residence and £200 a year to assist her in doing nothing. [A laugh.] ...This housekeeper had practically nothing to superintend, had not to weigh out the soap or look after the candles—[Laughter]—turn off the gas, or turn on the electric light.' HC Deb (4th series) 22 Aug 1895 vol 36 c598.

¹⁹ In 1899 the House of Lords 'Principal Housemaid' was paid £80 a year. *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, on the Houses of Lords and Commons Permanent Staff*. HC 286 (1899).

²⁰ House of Lords Offices Committee, 18 Mar 1902. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/365.

issue on the appointment of de Laney. William Aggas retired as Lords caterer in 1901,²¹ so he would have moved out and the House also lost the services of Jessie.

The decision that de Laney could live in caused a major conflict with the government. The Office of Works removed the Housekeeper's furniture, on the grounds she should not live in. The Treasury refused to pay for replacement furniture, arguing that the Housemaid's wages were 30s a week, 'a rate generally found sufficient to obtain the services of a competent female servant for whom sleeping accommodation is not provided.'²² Having reached impasse, the Clerk of the Parliaments bought the furniture at a cost of £85 8s 10d, and the Lords Offices Committee reimbursed him from the House of Lords Fee Fund Account.²³ The incident is interesting not only as an insight into the importance the Lords placed on their housekeeper, but as an example of the House of Lords asserting authority over Government. As the Clerk of the Parliaments wrote to the Treasury at the time,

I do most seriously deplore such a difference of opinion on seemingly so small a matter as a housemaid's bed: but of course the larger question of the jurisdiction of the House over its own premises and servants is involved, and of the right of any Department to swoop down and deprive it practically of the use of any portion of the building assigned to its occupation.²⁴

Amelia de Laney retired in 1919.²⁵ The post of resident Housekeeper continued until 1948, and was pensionable from the 1920s.²⁶ The Housekeeper was assisted by a number of housemaids.

²¹ HL Offices Committee, 11 Jul 1901. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/361.

²² HL Offices Committee, 2nd report (HL 174) 31 Jul and 3rd report, 5 Dec 1902. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/365.

²³ A very large sum, worth more than £4800 in today's money.
<<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>> accessed 23 Mar 2012. The Fee Fund, funded by the government, paid for the general administration and expenditure of the House of Lords.

²⁴ Henry Graham to Sir Francis Mowatt, 10 Oct 1902. PA, HL/PO/AC/15/11.

²⁵ Her salary by 1916 was £94. *Estimates for civil services for the year ending 31 March 1917*, HC 26 (1916-7), p.117. Her retirement was recorded in *House of Lords Offices Committee 4th report* 29 Jul 1919, HL 150 (1919), PA, HL/PO/CO/1/426. She was replaced by Mrs J E Rogers (PA, HL/PO/AC/6/7) who died in post in 1928. Rogers was succeeded by Catherine Bell.

²⁶ By 1929 Catherine Bell was paid £165. *Civil estimates and estimates for revenue departments for the year ending 31 March 1930*, HC 59 (1928-29), p68. By 1939 she was paid £159. *Civil estimates and estimates for revenue departments for the year ending 31st March 1940*, HC 70 (1938-39), p93. The residential post was abolished when Bell retired in 1948; an additional weekly payment was made to the

In 1899, there were 11 Housemaids paid 14-15 shillings a week each.²⁷ By 1918 there were 15.²⁸ Many served for long periods; a pensions book compiled in the early to mid-20th century records retirement gratuities to 18 housemaids whose years of service ranged between 7 and 39 years, most serving more than 20 years.²⁹

'Mother and Father to their Children': House of Commons female sessional cleaners

In the House of Commons, there was no female resident Housekeeper equivalent to de Laney in the early 20th century. Male Office Keepers were resident and they oversaw the work of a number of male and female sessional cleaners who worked for the department of the Serjeant-at-Arms. There were two women referred to as Housekeepers or Housemaids who were established permanent staff but not resident. The Housekeepers included some long-standing employees, such as Catherine Hills, Housekeeper 1880-1912,³⁰ and Mrs Hart, who died in 1916 after a staggering 48 years' service.³¹

Although the two housekeepers were entitled to a pension or gratuity on retirement,³² other female cleaners had no such entitlement. The Serjeant repeatedly wrote to retiring female cleaners to this effect.³³ The staff salaries and terms and conditions of employment in the Commons were subject to Treasury rules, leading to a three-way tension between the

Head Housemaid instead. *House of Lords Offices Committee 4th report*, HL 145 (1947-1948). 20 Jul 1948. PA, HL/PO/DC/OF/2/2.

²⁷ *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, on the Houses of Lords and Commons Permanent Staff*, HC 286 (1899). By 1939 there were 16 housemaids, paid 26-28 shillings a week.

²⁸ PA, HL/PO/AC/15/63.

²⁹ PA, HL/PO/AC/6/7.

³⁰ Letter to Commissioners requesting pension 5 Mar 1912. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/2, p297. It was granted. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/3, p143.

³¹ Letter regarding Mrs Hart, housemaid, 2 Mar 1916. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/2, p365. A pension was granted, PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/3, p215.

³² This was voluntarily relinquished by post holders E Pearce and F A Kingdon in 1924, who asked to be removed from the Established staff and placed on the unestablished staff, thereby forfeiting any claim to a work pension. The reason appears to be that that they wanted to be allowed to serve until age 70, when they would become eligible for old age pensions. PA, HC/SA/SJ/8/11.

³³ For example, the Serjeant's letter to Mrs Mossenten, Nov 1915. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/2, p360. Her letter is in PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/3, p209.

employees, their employer, the House of Commons, and their paymaster, the Treasury. The records of the Serjeant-at-Arms show a number of petitions from staff, which he forwarded to the Treasury, sometimes supporting their case. In 1896 he pointed out that the House of Lords cleaners were employed all year round while the Commons sessional cleaners were thrown out of work when the House was not sitting, causing considerable hardship. He suggested that wages could be reduced per month if paid all year round, for men but also 'if this principle could also be applied to the female sessional cleaners (7 in number) in my department, it would relieve them from much anxiety and even distress during the recess'.³⁴

Unfortunately for the distressed sessional cleaners, the Treasury was not willing to pay for work which was not carried out, and held this position until 1921 when it agreed to pay salaries the full year round – but only for the men.³⁵ The women petitioned as follows in 1919:

'We fully appreciate being retained during the War, may we be allowed to state that during that time we have done the extra duties of both male and female cleaners...employment is almost an impossibility as employers will not engage us for short periods... May we be allowed to point out that we have to be mothers as well as Father to our children and in times like these it is a terrible trial...'

M Holland, M Ross, E L Walsh, R Harris, J Champ, E Exford, H Gunter, M Russell³⁶

The Serjeant did not support this, remarking, 'No doubt they would be able to find work elsewhere during the Recess, much more easily than the men.'³⁷ But by 1921 he recognised that this was not the case: 'Last year when they endeavoured to find suitable employment during the Autumn recess they found it impossible to do so.'³⁸ In 1922 he actively supported them. By now it was clear that, as the women were deemed to be working in domestic service, they were not eligible for unemployment benefits. The Treasury dismissed this argument as

³⁴ Letter dated 25 Sept 1896. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/2, pp.190-1 .

³⁵ Letter to Speaker, 22 Jul 1921. A letter from the Treasury commissioners of 18 Aug 1921 confirms this did not apply to women. The sessional cleaners had received 'retaining fees' through recesses during the war, and from 1921 the male sessional cleaners were paid the full year round. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/3, p271 and p292.

³⁶ PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/4, p13 (attached to commissioners reply 6 Aug 1919). A similar petition dated 22 Feb 1922 is in TNA, T 162/550.

³⁷ Letter from the Serjeant accompanying petition from male sessional cleaners. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/4, p7.

³⁸ Letter regarding employing women over recess, July 1921. PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/4, p32.

'wholly irrelevant' as there was 'plenty of employment for women of that class.'³⁹ The situation was not resolved, but the administration found ways to mitigate the situation; a note from 1938 explains that three senior women sessional cleaners were also employed as attendants in the Ladies Cloakroom, to create full-time employment in these posts.⁴⁰

The Girl Porters

Four other women were employed by the Serjeant-at-Arms department before 1939. These were temporary Girl Porters, or Girl Messengers, employed to deliver mail between offices during labour shortages in the First World War. They were Elsie and Mabel Clark (aged 16 & 14), Dorothy Hart (18) and Vera Goldsmith (16), paid on the same rate as War Office girl messengers and provided with the same uniform of brown drill overalls and hats. They worked from 10 AM to 6 PM on weekdays when the House was sitting. They were employed from April 1917, and discharged in March 1919 on the return of demobilised staff (except Mabel Clark, who died of influenza in November 1918).⁴¹

Hilda Martindale wrote of girl messengers who, 'in their brown overalls, flooded Government Departments and did their best, often with considerable success, to cope with work formerly done by hoary-headed old men,'⁴² and this appears to be an accurate portrayal of the House of Commons experience too. The Serjeant held off employing women until 1917, when his staff of male porters was reduced to two, later than other organisations.⁴³ He wrote to the Speaker to warn, 'It is an innovation', and to heads of offices requesting that office messengers do 'a greater share in carrying heavy boxes and books.' But, by the end of their employment, his doubts and fears had been completely allayed. He wrote to the Superintendent of Girl Messengers at the War Office, 'It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the way these three girls have done their work while at the House of Commons, and their conduct has been exemplary throughout.' He wanted to arrange their transfer to another government

³⁹ The Serjeant's side of the correspondence is in PA, HC/SA/SJ/1/4; the Treasury's in TNA, T 162/550.

⁴⁰ Note dated 7 Dec 1938. PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/14.

⁴¹ The pay was 9/s a week if aged 14-16, 12/s if aged 16-18, with 1/s war bonus in both cases. Hart and Goldsmith were recruited via the War Office, the Clark sisters through a family connection to the House of Commons (a note in the file remarks 'Nieces of Porter Clark'). PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/13.

⁴² Hilda Martindale, *Women servants of the state 1870-1938: a history of women in the civil service* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1938), p81.

⁴³ The Post Office and London County Council resorted to girl messengers in 1915. Information from Helen Glew.

department if possible.⁴⁴ Girl porters were employed again during the Second World War, although without the same degree of angst about carrying loads and uniforms. Two were employed in December 1941⁴⁵ and two in more in 1942.⁴⁶

House of Commons Kitchen staff

Apart from Amelia de Laney's home, one other household in Parliament was occupied solely by women on census night in 1911: the Refreshment Department in the House of Commons. The 'head of household' who completed the form was C F King, the Refreshment manager, but he was not present as he did not live there.⁴⁷ Instead there were seven women servants, all single, aged 15-43, and born in various places across London. They consisted of four stillroom maids, one tearoom maid, and two housemaids. The form records that there were ten bedrooms, showing a greater capacity than seven; presumably not everyone was present on census night. A committee found in 1901 that 14 women in the Refreshment Department occupied five rooms; Mr King, when asked if it was necessary that all of them lived in, said, 'You cannot turn women out at two o'clock in the morning.'⁴⁸ These arguments were restated in 1937, when Mavis Tate asked, 'Is the right hon Gentleman absolutely sure that 18 rooms are necessary for members of the kitchen staff in the Palace of Westminster?' Albert Alexander expressed the opinion 'many hon. Members would not wish accommodation to be taken away from the women staff who are kept late on duty.'⁴⁹ A comparison of the individual names in 1901 and 1911 shows only one was there in both years. Possibly there was a high turnover

⁴⁴ It does not appear to have been possible, as the Serjeant later wrote (glowing) references for the girls for different jobs elsewhere. PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/13.

⁴⁵ Mrs Janet Eileen Edwell and Mrs J V Clark, who lived at the same address. Edwell married Pte Alfred Garner of the Irish Guards in 1945, but kept her job, and on 30 May 1949 she became a female cleaner. PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/10.

⁴⁶ Mrs Grace Phyllis Coulber was employed as a Temporary Female Porter in May 1942 in a clear case of a wife substituting for a husband; a Mr Coulber, Porter, was called up by the RAF directly beforehand. She was discharged redundant on 19 Jan 1946, and he returned from active duty on 18 Mar 1946. The final Second World War woman porter was Miss Teresa Mary O'Grady, employed Sep 1942 and discharged Dec 1945. PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/10.

⁴⁷ Charles Frederick King was at home with his wife, daughter, son and one female servant in Reigate, Surrey, on census night 1911. He, his wife and daughter were living in the House of Commons in 1901, so perhaps the move out to their own home in Reigate ten years on is a mark of increased means.

⁴⁸ *Select Committee on the House of Commons Accommodation*, HC 234 (1901).

⁴⁹ HC Deb 20 Dec 1937 vol 330 c1593, Albert Alexander (Labour Co-op).

among the younger female staff in the Commons Refreshment Department, although there is evidence that some worked there for long periods.⁵⁰

The work of the Commons Refreshment Department was overseen by the Kitchen Committee. Their minutes show the same problem with their staff that the Serjeant had with female sessional cleaners; they could not all be paid when the House was not sitting. A small number were employed permanently, and retaining allowances were paid to others, but the rest had to be given notice.⁵¹ Women refreshment staff sometimes appear in records elsewhere, usually when something went wrong, such as an accident, a theft, or the following hopefully more unusual incident described in a report by Police Inspector J Mason to the Serjeant at Arms:

I beg to report that at 12.40 pm 23 May 1924, whilst Miss May Weatherly, age 19, of 12 Clyston Street, Clapham SW, employed by the Kitchen Committee, House of Commons, was ascending the staircase from Lower Waiting Hall to the Upper Waiting Hall, Wilfrid Talbot of 'Tormunham', Lenham Road, Sutton, met her and placed his arm around her neck and attempted to kiss her.⁵²

Talbot was employed by the Post Office in the House of Commons. The policeman went on to say 'as the assault was of a trivial nature, and not witnessed' he referred Miss Weatherly to a magistrate, but she subsequently accepted an apology. The Serjeant took it seriously enough to instruct that Miss Weatherly be told that if she wished any action to be taken, he would do so.

House of Lords Kitchen staff: Unpaid wives and a Manageress

The House of Lords established its own contracted-out refreshment department after the completion of the new Palace of Westminster in the 1850s, managed by a Keeper, Superintendant, Caterer or Manager who received a grant to cover the costs of staff and

⁵⁰ See chapter 6, section on the Kitchen Committee, for more on Refreshment Department staff.

⁵¹ For example in Dec 1937 a schedule lists thirty staff who were kept on during recess, of whom 16 were women. Only two of the women were permanently employed, the remainder were paid retaining allowances. PA, HC/CL/CO/EA/2/7. One of these two was a Miss M King; if this is the same Martha King recorded in the 1911 census, she would have been 63 years old by this time and have worked for the Commons for 40 years.

⁵² PA, HC/SA/SJ/10/14, piece 220. The Serjeant's response is noted at the end of the police report.

supplies, and was given accommodation on the premises. His work was overseen by the Lords Offices Committee, which delegated this task to a Refreshment Sub-Committee from 1917.

The Lords Refreshment Department undoubtedly always employed women as barmaids, kitchen maids and waitresses, although they rarely appear in the official records. Not only were they not employees of the House, they were sometimes not employees even of the contractor. There seem to have been a pattern of having male managers whose wives would serve as unpaid cooks. William Aggas, Refreshment superintendant from 1875, retired in 1901 when it was noted that the loss of his wife in 1899 had 'materially affected the proper supervision of the kitchen arrangements'.⁵³ His successor was William Casbon and a wage list from 1907 includes a note that there was no chef employed because Casbon's wife performed the duties of a chef, 'otherwise an experienced cook would have to be employed at about £70'.⁵⁴ The operation was run on the lines of a stately home, where the gardener and the cook might be a married couple living in a cottage on the estate; maybe not so surprising in the House of Lords.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the Lords employed a woman Refreshment Superintendant before the Second World War. Successive contractors found recurring problems running a department with a varied income dependent on the odd dates and times the House sat. When AJ Carpenter terminated the contract on going into liquidation in 1938, the Lords could find only one company willing to take it on. This company was Jane Brown, managed (and probably owned) by a Miss Waddell. She proposed to provide 'waiters and not waitresses and to have a lady superintendent instead of a man'.⁵⁵ Unfortunately this business relationship rapidly

⁵³ Aggas had been in the service of the House since 1843, beginning as 'odd boy at £14 pa'. HL Offices Committee, 11 Jul 1901. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/361.

⁵⁴ William Casbon asked for more money on 19 Aug 1907. His wage list includes 3 kitchen maids (paid £52, £39 and £20), a barmaid (£26), 1 waitress (£26), and also 3 waiters, all paid out of an allowance of £300. *HL Offices Committee 1st report* HL 190 (1907), PA, HL/PO/CO/1/385.

⁵⁵ Refreshment Sub-Committee Report, 8 Dec 1938. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/534.

turned sour. Waddell took over in January 1939 and gave notice to terminate in June.⁵⁶ This was followed by a legal wrangle over the sum of £81.⁵⁷

Another woman took charge, rather more successfully. Miss E W Hoath took over the catering as 'Manageress'. There are no records detailing her appointment and she appears to have been working in the Refreshment Department in some capacity already.⁵⁸ She quickly balanced her current accounts and began to pay off outstanding debts. The Refreshment sub-committee was very pleased.⁵⁹ Hoath retired in 1961 after 22 years running the House of Lords Refreshment Department. She was not entitled to a pension, and the Refreshment Sub-committee was reminded of 'the great debt the House owes Miss Hoath for her reliability, loyalty and hard work, particularly during the last war.' A retirement fund was organised.⁶⁰ The sub-committee, heavily influenced by one of the first women peers, Lady Reading, also agreed that, 'a woman should be appointed rather than a man,' as her successor. A Miss M Riddell, formerly of Marks & Spencers' catering department, was duly appointed.⁶¹

The picture of employment of women as cleaning and catering staff in this period shows that the House of Lords appears to have been more receptive to women staff than the Commons, with its resident Housekeeper, permanently employed and pensionable Housemaids, and a woman Refreshment Superintendant in 1939. The situation in the Commons appears rather less sympathetic an environment for women.

⁵⁶ She blamed financial losses. The Clerk of the Parliaments thought it was because she had failed to get the catering contract for the Lord Chancellor's Breakfast that year. Refreshment Sub-Committee meeting, 31 Jan 1940. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/534.

⁵⁷ Waddell claimed this sum had been paid by her as additional wages in lieu of housing accommodation. Refreshment Sub-Committee meeting 12 Mar 1940 and 4 Jun 1940. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/534.

⁵⁸ Refreshment sub-committee meeting 31 Jan 1940 says simply that Miss Hoath undertook catering when Miss Jane Brown threw up her contract. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/534.

⁵⁹ In 1942 she was given the authority to sign cheques. In 1943 they gave Hoath and her staff a bonus of £117.10.0 of which her share was £25. Refreshment sub-committee meetings 4 Mar 1942 and 26 Oct 1943. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/534.

⁶⁰ They raised nearly £1000 via a subscription from peers, to which was added a Treasury gratuity of £750 and £250 from the Refreshment Department's funds. Hoath was also given a luncheon and a watch. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/606.

⁶¹ Meetings 9 Feb and 25 April 1961. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/606. Miss Riddell left in 1964 and was replaced by another woman, Miss Sheila R Wilson.

Skilled workers and secretaries

Women were working for Parliament even though not employed directly by either House, in a number of areas. For example, women working for the General Post Office were employed as telephone switchboard operators from the establishment of an exchange on the premises in 1907. In 1914 there were six such women.⁶²

Printing and bookbinding were professions that often employed women, albeit restricted to well-defined tasks and for lower wages,⁶³ and women were employed as compositors working on Parliamentary publications.⁶⁴ These papers were printed by private companies appointed by the government, however Parliament took an active interest in their work. In 1906 a Select Committee was first appointed to look into expenditure on Official Publications. Henry Burt, Chairman of Wyman & Sons Ltd, spoke to the committee in passing about the employment of women printing Parliamentary Debates at Wyman's Reading location: 'I have skilled lady compositors who come up from Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Perth who can set up matter cleaner than any man compositor I have met with'. Despite this accolade, he went on to explain that the women were paid two shillings a week less than the men, because they were less versatile.⁶⁵ From 1907, the Select Committee on Official Publications became a regular 'core' committee and female labour is occasionally mentioned in its evidence, usually with reference to the lower cost. In 1911 Rowland Bailey, Controller of The Stationery Office, stated that contractors working on vellum binding may 'by putting their workforce into petticoats, so to speak, get the labour for very much less than the wages which are paid by other firms.'⁶⁶

⁶² PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/23. Women had been systematically employed by the GPO from 1870, in greater numbers and a wider variety of roles than any other government department. Helen Glew, 'Women's Employment in the General Post Office, 1914-1939', University of London: Institute of Historical Research, PhD thesis (2010).

⁶³ Felicity Hunt, 'Opportunities Lost and Gained: Mechanisation and Women's Work in the London Bookbinding and Printing Trades', Angela V John, ed, *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp71-93.

⁶⁴ E.g. Acts of Parliament, Bills, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Select Committee reports, and other reports printed 'by Command' such as reports of Royal Commissions.

⁶⁵ *House of Commons Select Committee on Official Publications*, HC 279 (1906), pp128-9.

⁶⁶ Bailey also remarked that typists were women 'as a rule'. *Select Committee on Publications and Debates*, HC 259 (1911), p6 and p19.

By the late 19th century, women were increasingly employed in secretarial work in the wider world.⁶⁷ Some worked as secretaries for MPs, such as Margaret Travers Symons, secretary to Labour Party founder Keir Hardie, who burst into the chamber of the House of Commons to demand votes for women in 1908 and was recorded in Hansard.⁶⁸ As these secretaries were employed privately by the MPs rather than by the House administration, they have left little trace in Parliamentary records. Those who do appear are secretaries of prominent politicians asking to be admitted to areas of the building from which they were barred. For example, the Serjeant-at-Arms agreed in 1919 that a ticket for the Ladies' Gallery could be issued on special occasions to Miss E M Watson CBE, private secretary to the Leader of the House [Bonar Law], 'as is done occasionally in the case of Miss F L Stevenson CBE, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister' [Lloyd George].⁶⁹ The Serjeant similarly corresponded with Rose Rosenberg, secretary to the Leader of the Opposition (Ramsay MacDonald), on admission to the galleries in December 1924.⁷⁰ Rosenberg was the first woman to be admitted to the Strangers' Dining Room (Upstairs) where twelve places were reserved for private secretaries of MPs.⁷¹

Women typists⁷² were initially centrally employed in Parliament on a contracted-out basis. In 1895, Ashworth's Typewriting Office was engaged by the Serjeant-at-Arms to provide typing services. Miss Ashworth maintained a Type Writing Room and a staff of typists also qualified to write shorthand. In 1925 Ashworth's employed 14 staff and claimed to have 250 MPs as clients, with 35-40 visits to their room every day, some using them to deal with the whole of their correspondence, others when their own secretaries failed them through illness. Initially

⁶⁷ Clerical work provided an area of work for middle-class women away from nursing, teaching, shop work and printing. The work was clean, dainty, allowed for only limited contact with social inferiors and men, and was available on a wide scale. Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: the Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914', in Angela V John, ed, *Unequal Opportunities*.

⁶⁸ 'At this point a woman ran into the Chamber within the Bar, and exclaimed: "Leave off discussing the children's question, and turn your attention to the women first."' HC Deb 13 Oct 1908 vol 194 c243.

⁶⁹ PA, HC/SA/SJ/8/9 piece 5.

⁷⁰ PA, HC/SA/SJ/8/3.

⁷¹ Rosenberg was admitted on 11 Dec 1928, a day after the decision was made. PA, HC/SA/SJ/8/7.

⁷² Typing was a gender-free skill on its invention but soon became feminised and allocated as low-paid work for women, while men were transferred out of low-level office jobs and redeployed in superior career-based grades. Gregory Anderson, ed, *The White-Blouse revolution: female office workers since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); R Guerriero-Wilson, 'Women's work in offices and the preservation of men's "breadwinning" jobs in early twentieth century Glasgow', *Women's History Review*, 10(3) (2001), pp463-482.

the typists were at the disposal of Members only, but they soon came to work for offices in both Houses.⁷³ Run by a succession of women managers, Ashworth's continued to work in Parliament until well after the Second World War.

Female secretarial staff were employed directly by the House of Commons from at least the 1930s. The first identifiable woman was a Mrs Brazil, employed as a shorthand typist at a rate of 1/6d per hour in March 1937.⁷⁴ There was a small influx of such appointments during the Second World War. Women were employed initially on a temporary basis, and some were kept on permanently. There were four women typists employed between 1940-1942 who were also members of the Palace of Westminster Home Guard; Miss Pamela Ward, Miss Pauline Bebbington, Miss Barbara Shuttleworth and Miss Pamela Matthew.⁷⁵ Ward resigned in 1946, but the other three were given permanent positions in the House of Commons as Personal Assistants during 1946-1947.⁷⁶

Official Shorthand Writers to Parliament

As women were typing and taking shorthand in offices, it might be wondered whether women were involved in the note-taking required for recording Parliamentary proceedings. One place they were not employed was by Gurney's, the Official Shorthand Writer to Parliament.

Parliament employed the senior partner in the firm W B Gurney & Sons as Official Shorthand Writer from the 18th century, to take notes at select committees and other occasions such as trials in Parliament.⁷⁷ Although Gurney's own account of its early history remarks that 'the Gurney ladies were as industrious as the men', there is no evidence that Gurney's employed women until after the Second World War, when 'female shorthand writers made their first

⁷³ By 1925 they worked for all departments, with work for officials of the House of Lords costing on average of £200PA and House of Commons £100PA. PA, HC/SJ/SA/8/3 piece 65.

⁷⁴ She worked for the Serjeants' department and the Clerk of the House. There was another woman typist in the Committee and Private Bill Office by 1939, as their salaries were equalised. Mrs Brazil was re-graded as Confidential Secretary to the Serjeant in Dec 1939, and resigned in 1940. PA, HC/SA/SJ/9/14 piece 7.

⁷⁵ The four women appeared in press photographs of the Palace of Westminster Home Guard. The caption recorded, 'There are also a few women who work on communications and are expert shots.' PA, HC/CL/CH/3/10.

⁷⁶ Bebbington resigned on marriage in 1949, Shuttleworth died in 1948, and Matthew worked for Parliament until the late 1950s. Salary book, PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

⁷⁷ Most famously, Gurney took the shorthand notes at the trial of Warren Hastings, 1788-1795.

appearance' during the manpower shortage.⁷⁸ The Official Shorthand Writer, Herbert Arthur Stevens, was asked by the Select Committee on Publications and Debates in 1932 if he employed any women shorthand writers. He replied no, 'I have never thought that a woman was physically capable of doing it.'⁷⁹ (One can only wish that Stevens could be fast-forwarded fifty years to find that the Official Shorthand Writer to Parliament was now a woman.)⁸⁰ Stevens' opinion is all the more archaic given how many women were working as shorthand writers both inside and outside Parliament.⁸¹

'Press forward to open': the Parliamentary Press Gallery

Another area where men took notes of Parliamentary proceedings was in the Press Gallery, where the Serjeant-at-Arms strictly controlled the newspaper reporters who were privileged to sit. In 1938 the barrister and feminist campaigner Helena Normanton urged women to 'press forward to open the Church, the Stock Exchange, the House of Lords, the Diplomatic and Consular Services, the Press Gallery in the House of Commons, and the Overseas Civil Services to women'.⁸² The inclusion of the Press Gallery in such a list might seem rather odd, as the first women appeared there in 1919; two female journalists from the *Daily News* and the Central News Agency were issued special pink tickets for the occasion.⁸³ However this was an exception, to cover the occasion of Nancy Astor taking her seat in the Commons as the first women MP. Pink tickets denoted temporary access to the Gallery, not gender. The Press

⁷⁸ *The Anniversary of W B Gurney & Sons* booklet, 1985. PA, GUR/92.

⁷⁹ *Report from House of Commons Select Committee on Publications and Debates*, HC 115 (1931-32), p14.

⁸⁰ *HL Offices Committee 1st report* (1980-1981), 17 Dec 1980. The first woman Official Shorthand Writer to Parliament was Mrs Elizabeth Holland, 1981-1993. Holland joined the firm as a trainee in 1952 and became Deputy Official Shorthand Writer in 1976.

⁸¹ Although once a skilled job for male clerks, shorthand writing had become a female task since becoming linked to typing. Teresa Davy, "'A Cissy Job for Men, a Nice Job for Girls': women shorthand typists in London 1900-1939' in Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, eds, *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work* (Macmillan 1986), pp124-144.

⁸² Joanne Workman, 'Normanton, Helena Florence (1882–1957)', *ODNB*. See chapter 2 for the other institutions on Normanton's list.

⁸³ Press Gallery Committee minutes 2 Dec 1919. PA, PRG/1/4. The women are not named there, although the *Daily News* reporter was named as Marguerite Cody in Andrew Sparrow, *Obscure scribblers: a history of parliamentary journalism* (London, Politico's, 2003).

Gallery annual report for 1919-1920 did not even bother to record the event, although it mentioned that ladies were present at the annual Gallery dinner for the first time, as guests.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, 1919 did mark a change in official Parliamentary policy, as the Serjeant-at-Arms, perhaps influenced by the brand new Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, stated that 'in future no distinction of sex could be made in regard to admission.'⁸⁵ The first request for a female Parliamentary reporter, from the *Women's Penny Paper*, had been refused in 1890, when the Serjeant said, 'The consequences were too difficult to conceive.'⁸⁶ After the change in policy in 1919 women occasionally appeared in the Gallery on a temporary basis during the inter-war period, such as Ellen Wilkinson who wrote about Parliament for the *Daily Express* after she lost her Middlesbrough East seat in 1931.⁸⁷ Also, some women reported on Parliament from outside the Press Gallery, and at least one obtained a ticket to the Press Gallery's refreshment facility.⁸⁸

Women finally fulfilled Helena Normanton's ambition and established themselves in the Press Gallery permanently during the Second World War. A Miss Ellen Baylis (Mrs Ellen Harris) from Reuters became the first woman to hold a personal and permanent ticket to the Press Gallery in 1941. The Reuters chief of Parliamentary news wrote to explain:

Under the scattered conditions in which the Gallery lives now-a-days I do not think this will cause anybody any inconvenience though I have tried to avoid it for as long as possible. She is a very quiet and unassuming person, well used to men. She is married.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ PA, HC/SA/SJ/12/7, piece 59.

⁸⁵ Press Gallery Committee minutes 2 Dec 1919. PA, PRG/1/4.

⁸⁶ The Serjeant's remark is quoted in Sparrow, *Obscure Scribblers*. The lists of unsuccessful applications confirm that there was one from the *Women's Penny Paper* in 1890; also from the *Women's Tribune* in 1906 and from *Women's News and Views* in 1922-1923. PA, HC/SA/SJ/12/5.

⁸⁷ She was given a ticket on 15 Feb 1932 and left on 22 Feb. PA, HC/SA/SJ/8/1,7 piece 10. She was re-elected for Jarrow in 1935.

⁸⁸ Vera Hemmens, Lobby Correspondent for the *Newcastle Chronicle and North Mail*, held a ticket to the Gallery's refreshment facility for a period in 1930. PA, PRG/2/34. She was refused permission to use telephones and office typewriters in November 1930. PA, HC/SA/SJ/12/8, piece 132. Also Press Gallery meeting 10 Dec 1930. PA, PRG/1/5.

⁸⁹ PA, PRG/9/1. Letter 4 Nov 1941.

The chairman of the Gallery, Stanley Robinson from *The Times*, replied:

One of the chief beauties of the Gallery hitherto has been its immunity from all things feminine. It is true there have been women within its portals before; but they were birds of passage sent on transient missions by puckish editors... I look forward to the time when peace and reconstruction may restore to us our former tranquillity.⁹⁰

Peace and reconstruction may have brought tranquillity in one sense, but women were there to stay. Two more women received passes during 1942.⁹¹ In 1945 Eirene Jones (later Eirene White, and elected an MP in 1950), political correspondent for the *Manchester Evening News*, became the first provincial journalist to get a Gallery pass.⁹²

Hansard (the Official Report): Women reporters, 'A Dangerous Experiment'

As well as the press gallery, the Commons and the Lords had galleries for reporters to produce the official edited verbatim record of speeches and debates. *Parliamentary Debates*, also known as Hansard, began in 1803 but through its first century it was written by newspaper reporters and contractors. It became the Official Report, with the Commons and Lords directly employing editors and reporters, in 1909. It was suggested as far back as 1878 that women might be employed as Hansard reporters, when William Saunders, proprietor of Central News agency, remarked, 'In America they have Lady Reporters in the Gallery, and I think ladies in the Ladies' Gallery here would be quite capable of reporting if they were allowed to do so.'⁹³ This remark was only made in passing, however; it was not actually being considered at that time.

Before anyone considered women as Hansard reporters, the first hurdle was to employ them as typists. This certainly occurred before 1909, although evidence is scanty.⁹⁴ Once the Official

⁹⁰ PA, PRG/9/1. Letter 5 Nov 1941.

⁹¹ Miss J Locke was added to the list on 9 Feb 1942 as one of 12 reporters for the Empire Press Union; she reported for *The Statesman (India)*. On 1 July 1942 Miss K McColgan (*Sunday Pictorial*) was added to the list. PA, HC/SA/SJ/12/3.

⁹² Joe England, 'White, Eirene Lloyd, Baroness White (1909–1999)', *ODNB*. In 2011, a woman was at last elected Chairman of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, BBC Radio 4 journalist Carolyn Quinn. Her name is duly inscribed on the list of Chairmen in the Press Gallery restaurant Moncrieff's [viewed March 2012].

⁹³ *Select committee on parliamentary reporting*, HC327 (1878), p.93.

⁹⁴ George Edsall, chief of staff of contractors, referred to a lady privately employed to transcribe the notes of a reporter in 1907. Evidence to the *Select Committee on Parliamentary Debates*, HC 239 (1907), p87.

Report was established in 1909, the Commons used women as typists via an agency: a select committee report on their work in 1913 describes the employment of four female typists who supported the work of twelve reporters. The Editor, Sir James Dods Shaw, explained, 'I was anxious to avoid the employment of girls altogether' but he found men typists unsatisfactory, and was 'driven to the expedient of employing girls.' He then tried to arrange for a staff of female typists but found the 'girls' he interviewed unwilling to give up permanent employment elsewhere to work and be paid in the Commons for only part of a year. He resorted to Ashworth's, who provided female staff from their office in Parliament on a rota.⁹⁵

The first evidence of women being employed as Hansard reporters in the Commons is in 1919, when full verbatim reporting was extended to the work of standing committees, with consequent pressure on staffing. The Editor, W Turner Perkins, told a select committee that he would need eight temporary staff on top of his 12 permanent reporters to cover the additional work, who could be men and women. He compared women 'very favourably' to men and the questioning makes clear that he was already employing women on a temporary basis:

Perkins: For instance, in addition to the four ladies who are covering the Acquisition of Land Bill this afternoon, I have just engaged a lady in the last ten minutes to assist in the Transport Committee.

...Mr MacVeagh: The Speaker was wrong, then, when he said the ladies were not born who could do that work?

Perkins: I have known lady reporters who do their work remarkably well....Good stenographers and intelligent women...

...Mr Moles: You do not look on it as a dangerous experiment?

Perkins: Not at all. An old reporter, when I came along to this committee, was humorously calling out 'Shame'. Of course, I knew what it meant. He said, 'How can I meet my wife to-night when I go home, and tell her I was relieving a lady?'⁹⁶

Nevertheless these women reporters were temporary or casual workers. The first permanent female Hansard reporter was Mrs Jean Winder, who was appointed in 1944 (presumably

⁹⁵ *Report from House of Commons Select Committee on Publications and Debates*, HC 224 (1913), pp15-17.

⁹⁶ *Report from House of Commons Select Committee on Publications and Debates*, HC 244 (1919), p27. The MPs are Jeremiah MacVeagh (Irish Nationalist) and Thomas Moles (Irish Unionist).

because of wartime labour shortages) on a salary below that of the men.⁹⁷ In 1947, the Editor, Mr P F Cole, told a select committee she was 'as good as the men'. He had problems recruiting more women because they were paid less and the male staff would not like to see him employing women to undercut them. He thought salaries should be equalised, and that, 'There is occasionally a little prejudice, but there is no real ground for objection if the rate for the job was paid.'⁹⁸ The committee recommended that 'efforts should be made and sustained to secure an increase in the number of reporters, men and women,'⁹⁹ although a second female Hansard reporter was not appointed until 1969.¹⁰⁰

Mrs Winder became the subject of Hansard debate in 1951 during a debate on equal pay. Irene Ward MP declared:

The House of Commons is run on the basis of equal pay... but there is one woman on the HANSARD staff in the Gallery, Mrs. Winder, who has not got equal pay, in spite of the fact that Mr. Speaker has made a strong recommendation to the Treasury that she should receive equal pay. I have got Mrs. Winder's permission to draw the attention of the House to what I consider is an intolerable constitutional position...¹⁰¹

Equal pay was achieved in the civil service in 1955 and implemented in stages. It is not known whether Mrs Winder, who retired in 1960, ever got her equal pay.

'Executive Women Servants': Library staff

Another area in which women might have been expected to be employed in this period is in the Libraries of both Houses. However this did not happen until after the Second World War.

It was claimed in February 2010 that Roseanne O'Reilly, who died on 6 February 2010 aged 84, was a librarian at the House of Commons for 40 years and the 'first executive woman servant

⁹⁷ She was appointed from 18 Feb 1944. Her salary was on the scale £450 to £600 in 1945, the female equivalent of the men's £560 to 700. House of Commons salary book, PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

⁹⁸ *House of Commons Select Committee on Publications and Debates*, HC 136 (1946-47), p9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.v.

¹⁰⁰ A Mrs M Pass appears on the staff lists published in the front of Hansard, in 1969.

¹⁰¹ HC Deb 2 Aug 1951 vol 491 cc1702-24.

of the Palace of Westminster.¹⁰² Roseanne O'Reilly was certainly an early woman employee in the Commons, employed in the Library from 14 October 1946. However, this initial employment was as a temporary shorthand typist; she was established as staff in 1947, and appointed personal assistant in 1949.¹⁰³ Without wishing to downplay these achievements, there were a number of women shorthand typists and personal assistants in the Commons by this date and it is not clear that O'Reilly was exceptional. Nor was she the first woman to work in the Library; two women, Ann Salter and Cairier Fawcett Thompson, were appointed as temporary cataloguers from March 1946.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Miss Dorothy Elizabeth Dusart was appointed as a Junior Library Clerk on 15 October 1946, almost exactly the same date as O'Reilly.¹⁰⁵ Dusart's appointment was permanent, her title and salary superior, and she has a much stronger claim to be the first woman executive servant of the Commons Library.

Dusart resigned in 1952 and O'Reilly was still a personal assistant in 1955, when the Librarian, Strathearn Gordon, fell foul of Irene Ward. As remembered by Jill Knight MP some years afterwards:

Dame Irene Ward was incensed to see in the columns of *The Times* an advertisement for a librarian in the House of Commons which stated that men only need apply... she received an unsatisfactory answer to the effect that... a librarian in the House of Commons Library would be expected to carry heavy ladders to get books down from the upper shelves.

Dame Irene threw down her Order Paper in anger, stalked out of the Chamber, went along to the Library, picked up a ladder, put it over her shoulder and came back into the Chamber, or tried to do so... Dame Irene stood at the Bar of the House with the ladder across her shoulders... it occasioned considerable trouble, because as she

¹⁰² Members were horrified, and 'nobody spoke to her for the first year'. Her godfather was the Commons Librarian Hilary St George Saunders. *Daily Telegraph* obituary, 25 Feb 2010.

¹⁰³ House of Commons salary book, PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171. The salary book records war service with the WRNS, although her *Daily Telegraph* obituary says she was demobilised from Bletchley Park.

¹⁰⁴ Salter was employed until August 1947, Thompson until September 1946. Salary book. PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

¹⁰⁵ When O'Reilly became personal assistant in 1949, her salary scale started at £280 p.a., by which time Dusart was being paid £408 p.a. Dusart was therefore considerably senior. Salary book. PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

turned from side to side many hon. Members were in constant danger of decapitation. She shouted "I have the ladder, and it is not too heavy".¹⁰⁶

Ward certainly threatened to carry a ladder into the chamber, although whether she actually did so is doubtful.¹⁰⁷ Ward took up the case at the urging of Miss J M Maton of the Council of Women Civil Servants. Gordon explained that the restriction was because twelve foot ladders were required to be carried 'and we find the girls cannot stand the resulting strain and tension'. He also argued that 'when recruitment to posts for Assistant Librarian were opened to women, several hundred applied whereas the number of men who applied was very much smaller.' As Maton drily observed, 'He seemed to object to having the task of going through hundreds of applications.'¹⁰⁸ Ward obtained an agreement by the Civil Service Commission to use the same method of appointment for Commons Library Clerkships as for other staff, as a guarantee that appointments would go to most suitable candidate. Ward and Maton regarded that as a victory.

Women as Clerks: Kay Midwinter, first Commons 'Girl Clerk'

So Hoath in the Lords Refreshment Department in 1939, Winder in Commons Hansard in 1944, and Dusart in the Commons Library in 1946 might all have claims to be the earliest women employed on an executive, or professional, level in Parliament. But who was the first woman *Clerk*? In Parliament, Clerks are the top rung of the ladder and not, as in other organisations, the bottom. It is assumed today that women Clerks were not appointed in the Commons until 1969.¹⁰⁹ However three women were appointed as on a temporary basis during the Second World War, and they have been forgotten; they are not listed in William McKay's biographical list of Clerks in the House of Commons.

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb 26 Mar 1975 vol 889 c579. Knight also referred to the incident in HC Deb 11 Jun 1981 vol 6 c587.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Ward, 23 Nov 1955. 'I have had a lot of fun telling the Authorities that I would be seen appearing with a ladder penetrating into the Chamber. I think this put the wind up everybody.' WL, 6/CCS/3/26/10.

¹⁰⁸ Meeting note 4 Apr 1955. WL, 6/CCS/3/26/10.

¹⁰⁹ McKay records two women clerks in 1969; Miss J Beston (later Jacquy Sharpe, now one of the most senior women in the Commons administration) and Miss Alda Milner-Barry. McKay, *Clerks in the House of Commons*.

The first woman Clerk was Kathleen ('Kay') Midwinter, who was appointed Temporary Clerk in the Committee and Private Bill Office on 29 April 1940.¹¹⁰ As the *Evening Standard* reported excitedly:

GIRL CLERK IN COMMONS

Parliamentary history was made yesterday by a girl. Miss K Midwinter, dark, slim, businesslike, who served the League of Nations for nine years, has been appointed a temporary clerk of the House of Commons. The first woman clerk has all the privileges extended to her male colleagues. She can listen to the debates from behind the bar or from the officials' gallery. In fact it will be at times be her duty to do so. And she is liable to be called on to act as a division clerk....The appointment is a war-time measure. It is also a complete break with precedent.¹¹¹

This 'girl' would have been 32 at the time of her appointment.¹¹² Midwinter's presence certainly caused a ripple in the establishment. One of her fellow Clerks, Basil Drennan, wrote to his parents, 'It has created a sensation in the Committee Office, a woman amongst all these men and for the first time in history... Another sanctuary gone, I feel.'¹¹³

Midwinter worked on the Select Committee on National Expenditure.¹¹⁴ She was initially the personal assistant to the committee Clerk, Captain Diver, but when it became clear she had the ability to clerk a sub-committee herself, she became Clerk to the Transport sub-committee in April 1941.¹¹⁵ Her duties were as follows:

¹¹⁰ PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

¹¹¹ *Evening Standard*, 1 May 1940. Press cutting with letter dated 2 May 1940 in PA, DRE/A/1/15. A fuller example of the same cutting is in Bodleian Library, United Nations Career Records Project, MS Eng c.4718. The story is a good example of a woman entering a male sphere being enthusiastically covered by the popular press. As Adrian Bingham remarks, 'the press tendency to dramatize its news ensured grand proclamations were made about the significance of these first steps.' Adrian Bingham, *Gender, modernity and the popular press in inter-war Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p40.

¹¹² PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

¹¹³ Letters dated 2 May and 3 May 1940, PA, DRE/A/1/15. His father replied regretting the loss of sanctuary. PA, DRE/A/2/15.

¹¹⁴ See chapter 6 on the NEC.

¹¹⁵ It was intended for Midwinter to clerk the Navy committee and Drennan to go to the Air committee; however Navy chairman Percy Harris MP refused to give up Drennan. Letter dated 27 Mar 1941. PA, DRE/A/1/16.

Conduct correspondence; call witnesses; arrange visits and tours and accompany the sub-committee; draw up plans of enquiry for Chairman and advise on Parliamentary procedure; make contact with Government departments through liaison officers; amplify and check information and facts received in evidence; write the draft report if the Chairman so wishes, or at any rate to assist largely in its preparation; watch the draft report through its various committee stages, and draft the Final Report which had to be laid on the table of the Clerk of the House in session.¹¹⁶

She worked with Drennan on one occasion when his Navy sub-committee made a joint visit with her Transport sub-committee to shipyards on the Clyde. He wrote to his parents, 'I have to make the arrangements in collaboration with Kay Midwinter... and have told her that she and Lady D will be in competition for the Queen of the May.'¹¹⁷

Midwinter became Clerk to the sub-committee on Works (A) in 1942, where she drafted their report on coal. Diver reported that 'From the unsatisfactory and limited material to which she was confined she showed considerable ability in producing on this thorny subject a useful document.' In addition she clerked Lady Davidson and Irene Ward's two-person sub-committee on Women's Medical Services; their first report was entirely drafted by Midwinter only five weeks after the Coal report. Diver said its success was 'largely attributable to Miss Midwinter's tactful handling of an inquiry which provided considerable Departmental opposition, to her continuous hard work and to her ability to take a good draft.'¹¹⁸ Midwinter also took notes of evidence taken for this sub-committee, a job that would normally be done by a separate shorthand writer.¹¹⁹ Transcripts of evidence confirm Midwinter was well regarded by MPs; she is largely invisible (as Clerks generally are) but appears as necessary to clarify issues or correct facts. The Chairman of the Fighting Services sub-committee, Sir Ralph Glyn, remarked on the drafting of the first Women's Medical Services report, 'That is again the work of Miss Midwinter. It is very admirable'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ As described by Midwinter herself. Bodleian, MS Eng c.4718.

¹¹⁷ Letter dated 2 April 1941. 'Lady D' was Joan Davidson MP. PA, DRE/A/1/16.

¹¹⁸ Diver to Williams, 29 June 1942. She also drafted three of the five reports while on Transport. PA, HC/CL/CH/2/2/107.

¹¹⁹ Co-ordinating sub-committee transcript 4, 21 Jan 1942. PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AA/33. Given the nature of the enquiry it was considered undesirable to have a male note-taker present at some meetings, so Midwinter had the 'extra burden of taking a running note'. PA, HC/CL/CH/2/2/107.

¹²⁰ PA, HC/CL/CO/AA/AN/1/1/12 p.3.

In one of several attempts to raise her salary, Diver argued that 'Her burdens have been considerably greater than, and have been as efficiently carried as, those of other sub-committee clerks whose emoluments are more than twice what she is receiving.'¹²¹ Diver's case was supported by O C Williams, Clerk of Committees. Additionally, the women MPs on NEC, Irene Ward and Lady Davidson, asked Midwinter what salary she was receiving; they 'expressed their conviction that Miss Midwinter is inadequately paid, and their intention of taking the matter up directly with Mr Speaker.'¹²² Midwinter was appointed initially at a salary of £260 a year. Upon being given a sub-committee clerkship her salary was raised to a scale starting at £350, but this was still far below her male colleagues, and, unlike theirs, her post was not permanent or pensionable. After all the effort by Diver, Williams, Ward and Davidson, Midwinter's salary was raised to the range of £480-£650 in 1942, 'being the women's equivalent of £600-800'.¹²³ So the maximum she could ever hope to earn was just £50 more than the minimum guaranteed to her male colleagues. Midwinter left the Commons on 14 Oct 1943, by which time she was earning £530. At the instigation of Ward and Davidson she went to work for the Foreign Office, and later for the United Nations.¹²⁴

Midwinter's significance as the first women Clerk should not be diminished because it was temporary. It was deemed extraordinary at the time, and Midwinter had to fight many small battles against Commons culture and procedures, including such simple-sounding things as standing on the floor of the House, as she related:

During the war I was standing behind the Speaker's Chair about 5 or 6 yards from Churchill while he made all his famous war speeches. He used to glare at me as much to say "What's this woman doing?" but he never challenged me. I was expecting to be ordered to be removed from the Chamber, but it was great fun and then when it came to laying the Report on the table of the House – you know, my male colleagues said "Oh you'd better not do that, you know, it has never been done by a woman before!"

¹²¹ Diver to Williams, 29 June 1942. PA, HC/CL/CH/2/2/107.

¹²² Williams to Sir Gilbert Campion, 2 July 1942. PA, HC/CL/CH/2/2/107.

¹²³ Salary book, PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171. Basil Drennan was earning £850 in this period; he was a much more experienced senior Clerk, but doing the same job as she was. The Treasury's deliberations on Midwinter's salary are in TNA, T 162/777.

¹²⁴ Ward and Davidson wished to increase the influence of women in the Foreign Office. Midwinter had a long distinguished career with the United Nations She married later in life, becoming Kathleen Midwinter-Vergin, and retired in 1969. Bodleian Library, MS Eng c.4718.

So I said "Well, for that reason I'm going to do it!" So there we are. But really one was up against male prejudice throughout. Absolutely. There was never any question of promotion.¹²⁵

Midwinter was the first, but not the only, woman temporary Clerk during the Second World War. There were two others. Previously a typist in the Committee Office earning 50/- per week, Miss D J Davson was appointed personal assistant to Diver when Midwinter was given the Transport sub-committee clerkship. Davson became temporary clerk on 1 April 1941 earning £260 pa.¹²⁶ Diver and Williams praised Davson almost as highly as Midwinter, Diver arguing she was required to perform 'most of the duties normally undertaken by an Assistant Clerk appointed to help with the work of a large Select Committee,' and Williams that he hoped to retain her after the war as, 'her work is invaluable, and she has, by her own energy, increased the scope of her appointment.'¹²⁷ But Davson's apparently promising career was curtailed by the marriage bar. She was put on the established staff on 5 July 1946, making her the first permanent woman Clerk - but only for a short time. She was removed from the established staff on marriage, on 8 October 1946, and was retained in an unestablished capacity as a shorthand typist. Thus ended the Commons wartime experiment with female Clerks.¹²⁸ As it was announced on 15 October 1946 that the marriage bar was to be abolished in the civil service,¹²⁹ a decision that would have filtered down to Parliament, Davson was caught by the bar by little more than a week.

The third wartime woman Commons Clerk was altogether a different kind of person. Dr Monica Felton was appointed Temporary Clerk on a salary of £600 from 28 May 1942. Unlike Midwinter, who had no formal academic qualifications, Felton had a PhD and previous government service as a Temporary Principal, hence the superior salary. It was still, however, less than Felton had previously earned.¹³⁰ She came to the Commons at the request of Labour

¹²⁵ Bodleian, Ms Eng c.4733 (oral history recording).

¹²⁶ PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171. Davson's first names do not appear in any Parliamentary sources. However marriage and transport records show that a Dorothy J Davson married a Geoffrey M Wolfe in 1946, and a Dorothy Jane Wolfe travelled to the US with her husband Geoffrey in 1951.

¹²⁷ PA, HC/CL/CH/2/2/107.

¹²⁸ PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

¹²⁹ HC Deb 15 Oct 1946 vol 427 cc794-6.

¹³⁰ PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171. Her previous salary was £650, referred to in PA, HC/CL/CH/2/2/107.

MP Lewis Silkin, the chairman of the Production and Supply sub-committee. Basil Drennan wrote:

She is a red-haired lame woman who is a member of the LCC and who has been working in the Ministry of Supply. She rather gives me the horrors.¹³¹

Felton's work for the House of Commons National Expenditure Committee is not as well-documented as Midwinter's.¹³² However her broader career in public life is very well documented. Monica Glory Page obtained a PhD in Economic History from the LSE and married Berwyn Idris Felton, also an LSE student, in 1931.¹³³ Her LSE file shows her to be an excellent student.¹³⁴ She went on to become a lecturer for the Worker's Educational Association¹³⁵ and to be elected to the London County Council (LCC) as a Labour member, 1937-1946.¹³⁶ She clearly felt some disillusion with Labour's attitude to women,¹³⁷ and the composer Michael Tippett recalled in his autobiography that he applied to join the Communist party in 1935 at the same time as 'a man known as Tank' and his wife Monica Felton.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Letter 2 June 1942. PA, DRE/A/1/17.

¹³² Drennan said she was employed as 'a sort of economic adviser'. PA, DRE/A/1/17. She wrote a novel in 1945 about women wartime factory workers, in which it is tempting to see the influence of the NEC report on women and factories (see chapter 6). Monica Felton, *To all the living* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945).

¹³³ *Register, 1895-1932* (London School of Economics and Political Science, 1934).

¹³⁴ She obtained a Studentship for Women on the recommendation of R H Tawney in 1929. Her thesis title was originally 'The Industrial Revolution and the Emancipation of Women', but became 'A study of emigration from Great Britain 1802-1860.' LSE student file, Monica Glory Page/Felton.

¹³⁵ She taught Economics at the Ilford WEA. Ernest Millington, *Was that really me?* (Fultus, 2006), p8.

¹³⁶ She was elected for St Pancras SW with fellow Labour candidate Maurice Orbach in 1937. Alan Woollard and John Willis, *Twentieth century local election results: vol 1 election results for the London County Council (1889-1961) and London Metropolitan Boroughs (1900-1928)* (Plymouth: Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, 2000), p33.

¹³⁷ 'The dreary grind of the Labour Party machine—the committee meetings, the selection conferences... the members of the women's section addressing envelopes and taking it in turns to bring the tea...' Monica Felton, *That's why I went. The record of a journey to North Korea* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1953), p75.

¹³⁸ It is the same Monica Felton; Tippett also remarks she went on to be a member of the LCC. Michael Tippett, *Those twentieth century blues: an autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), pp46-7. At some point 'Tank' and Monica's marriage ended, but it is not possible to determine exactly when. Berwyn Idris Felton had a child with another woman in 1940, and remarried in 1951; he and Monica may have separated due to either event.

At the LCC, she was Chairman of the Supplies Committee 1939-1941, resigning on her appointment to the Ministry of Supply.¹³⁹ She then went to work for the House of Commons, but 'resigned with permission' on 31 Dec 1943.¹⁴⁰ After the war, she became a member of Hertfordshire County Council, and chair of first Peterlee and then Stevenage New Town Corporations 1949-1951.¹⁴¹ However she was fired from this role by Hugh Dalton, Minister of Town and Country planning, after taking an unauthorised trip to North Korea for the Women's International Democratic Federation in 1951.¹⁴² It was a very controversial visit. Felton accused American, South Korean and British troops of massacres and other atrocities. She gave interviews to Radio Moscow and the *Daily Worker*, and was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. She was accused in Parliament¹⁴³ and in the popular press of being a Communist, with serious calls for her to be tried for treason.¹⁴⁴ Her employment as a Commons Clerk was mentioned but glossed over;¹⁴⁵ unsurprisingly there was a certain amount of distancing.¹⁴⁶ The episode ruined any prospect of a career in public life in the UK. She wrote a pamphlet and a book about her Korean experiences,¹⁴⁷ then made a new life for herself in India.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁹ She was elected as chairman on 9 May 1939. London Metropolitan Archives, LC/MIN/10,373.

¹⁴⁰ PA, HC/FA/FO/1/171.

¹⁴¹ It was a common path for LCC members to serve on New Town boards. Stevenage was 'twinned' with St. Pancras and other parts of north-west London. Andrew Saint, ed, *Politics and the people of London: the London County Council, 1889-1965* (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), p232.

¹⁴² The Women's International Democratic Federation, largely Communist in character, was formed by socialist women's organisations after the Second World War. Felton's actions were very high-profile and Dalton came under great pressure to fire her. LSE, Dalton 9/24. The significance of Felton's North Korean trip is considered in John Jenks, *British propaganda and news media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp55-56.

¹⁴³ HC Deb 13 Jun 1951 vol 488 cc2308-13; HC Deb 14 Jun 1951 vol 488 cc2676-86; HC Deb 7 Apr 1955 vol 539 cc1424-32.

¹⁴⁴ The Public Prosecutor's opinion was that there was no evidence for any charges. TNA, LO/2909.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Taylor MP: 'I understand that there was a time during the war when, on the recommendation of Mr. Silkin, now Lord Silkin, she was employed in a secretarial capacity on the Select Committee on National Expenditure of this House.' HC Deb 14 Jun 1951 vol 488 c2676.

¹⁴⁶ The Director of the LSE noted that she left the LSE court of governors when she got the Stevenage job; 'Lucky escape! LSE, Monica Glory Page/Felton student file.

¹⁴⁷ Monica Felton, *What I saw in Korea* [1951]; Monica Felton, *That's why I went. The record of a journey to North Korea* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1953).

Women Professionals and Clerks in the Lords

The House of Commons began employing women as Clerks, Library staff and Hansard reporters in the 1940s. However there were no similar temporary Second World War appointments in the Lords. Women appear on Lords senior staff lists in the 1970s,¹⁴⁹ and the first woman generalist Clerk was appointed in 1981.¹⁵⁰ There is an earlier example: Mrs Elisabeth Ross Poyser MA was appointed Assistant Clerk of the Records in 1950.¹⁵¹ She was previously a history research student at Newnham College, Cambridge.¹⁵² Poyser has a strong claim to be the first permanent woman Clerk in either House,¹⁵³ although the broader significance of her appointment is debatable. She was employed as an archivist and her employment was arguably an exceptional example of a woman working in a specialist area.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ She wrote biographies of Indian statesman Chakravarti Rajagopalachari and women's welfare reformer Sister Subhalakshmi. Monica Felton, *I meet Rajaji. Conversations with Chakravarti Rajagopalachari* (London: Macmillan & Co 1962); Monica Felton, *A child widow's story* (London: Gollancz, 1966).

¹⁴⁹ Marguerita Pedder OBE was appointed Head of Establishments in 1973. *HL Offices Committee 1st report*, HL 18 (1973-74), 12 Nov 1973. Miss M E Manisty MBE was appointed Assistant Clerk in the Judicial Office in 1974. Female Legal Assistants and Library Clerks were appointed from 1976-1977.

¹⁵⁰ Fiona MacLeod, from the civil service, was appointed Senior Clerk. *HL Offices Committee 4th report*, HL 265 (1980-1981) 21 July 1981. Miss MacLeod became Mrs Martin in 1986. *HL Offices Committee 2nd report*, HL 115 (1985-1986), 26 Mar 1986.

¹⁵¹ *HL Offices Committee 2nd Report*, HL 90 (1949-1950), 25 July 1950. Her salary scale was £330 rising by increments of £20 to a maximum of £500, revised the following year to £400 – 20 - £500. *HL Offices Committee 2nd Report*, HL 38 (1950-1951) 15 Mar 1951. Poyser resigned in 1965. *HL Offices Committee 1st report*, HL 16 (1965-1966) 1 Dec 1965. PA, HL/PO/DC/OF/2/2.

¹⁵² *House of Lords Record Office memorandum no. 2*, Annual Report for 1950.

¹⁵³ O'Reilly and Dusart were employed earlier in the Commons Library, but their clerkly status in 1950 is doubtful. During the librarian dispute of 1955, the only Parliamentary women employee identified by the Council of Women Civil Servants was Poyser, then on a salary of £470-£850. WL, 6/CCS/3/26/10.

¹⁵⁴ There was no Record Office in Parliament until 1946, so Poyser was one of the earliest archivists to work in Parliament. Archivism was a field of work sympathetic to women staff: Elizabeth Shepherd records that the main professional body for archivists was 'even-handed in its treatment of men and women' from its formation in 1946. Elizabeth Shepherd, *Archives and archivists in 20th century England* (Ashgate, 2009), p146. In government, women worked at the Public Record Office before the Second World War. The earliest was Mary Smieton, one of the first women to take the civil service Administrative exam in 1924-25, thanks to the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act (see chapter 2). Obituary in the *Guardian*, 28 Jan 2005.

However, there was a small enclave of women in a House of Lords department before the Second World War, at least one of whom held the undoubtedly executive and normally male position of Accountant.

The House of Lords Accounting and Copying Department: an inter-war female enclave

In 1902, the House of Lords merged two departments within the Parliament Office to form the Accounting and Copying Department. Titles of staff varied over the years, but the successive heads of the department are listed in Table 7.3.

Date	Name	Employment history
1903-1919	Thomas Ambrey Court (1850-1921)	Started working for HL in 1873. Assistant Copyist, 15 Aug 1878. Principal Copyist, 17 Aug 1880. Receiver of Fees, Accountant, and Examiner of Acts, 1 Jan 1903. By retirement 28 Feb 1919 his salary was £650.
1919-1926	H P Norris (1861-1954)	Assistant Copyist, 1 Feb 1883. Assistant Examiner of Acts, 1 Jan 1903. Receiver of Fees, Accountant and Examiner of Acts, 1 March 1919. Receiver of Fees, and Examiner of Acts, 1 June 1919 with salary of £200 (rising to £500). In 1921, raise to £300 (rising to £500). Retired 31 Jan 1927 with a salary of £600.
1927-1944	Miss Hannah Frances Mary Court (1880-1944)	Shorthand Typist in the Parliament Office, 1 April 1918. Accountant on salary of £200 rising to £500, 1 June 1919. Accountant, Receiver of Fees and Examiner of Acts, 1 Feb 1927 on salary rising to £600. Retired 1 July 1944 on £750 pa; 26 years service, pension of £342.10/-
1944-1957	Percy Johnson (1896-1973)	Assistant Accountant, 16 April 1936 (previously employed in the civil service). Accountant and Receiver of Fees, 1944. On retirement 1 March 1957 salary £1865 pa.

Table 7.3: Heads of the Accounting and Copying Department, House of Lords, 1903-1957¹⁵⁵

Daughter of Accountant Thomas Ambrey Court, Miss Hannah Frances Mary Court was appointed as one of two 'Lady Clerical Assistants' in April 1918, along with Miss Mabel Evelyn Waterman.¹⁵⁶ They were therefore appointed during shortages of male labour near the end of

¹⁵⁵ Compiled from *House of Lords Offices Committee* reports, the Parliament Office appointment book (PA, HL/PO/1/549/2) and Report on the Security Fund and Fee Fund (PA, HL/PO/AC/15/11).

¹⁵⁶ PA, HL/PO/1/549/2.

the First World War. But, unlike many such women, like the Girl Messengers in the House of Commons, both Court and Waterman kept their jobs after the war.

Another lady clerical assistant was employed from 1920.¹⁵⁷ The reason for this was that on 1 June 1919 Miss Court was appointed Accountant, although the Clerk of the Parliaments did not explain this to the Offices Committee which oversaw and approved such appointments. This was a deliberate change of authority: Norris, the newly promoted Receiver of Fees, Accountant and Examiner of Acts, had the word 'Accountant' dropped from his title after only three months, and the title was given to Court.¹⁵⁸ Court was placed on the same salary scale as Norris; a remarkable example in this period of equal pay. Both Court and Waterman, who was now Assistant Examiner of Acts, are listed in the House of Lords senior staff lists in *Parliamentary Debates* and *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* from 1919. A contrast can be drawn with the equivalent Commons' staff list where the Accountant and Assistant Accountant are unremittingly male throughout this period.

How important a position was that of Accountant? A statement to the Treasury in 1924 outlines the position as follows. The Clerk of the Parliaments, head of the House of Lords administration, was Accounting Officer and head of the Accounting Division. Direction was by a senior clerk as 'Supervisor of the Accountant's Department', and 'all work in connexion with payments and keeping and rendering of accounts etc is carried out by the Accountant.'¹⁵⁹ The supervisory role was performed in this period by C K Davidson and F W Lascalles, and their signatures appear on the accounts alongside Court's.¹⁶⁰ But Davidson and Lascalles had many responsibilities, would not have carried out the accounting work and probably devoted little time to checking it. Court performed all the calculations, paid salaries, pensions and other fees, countersigned cheques,¹⁶¹ corresponded with the Treasury, and ensured information was printed and laid as necessary.¹⁶² There is no doubt that her role was an executive and a

¹⁵⁷ *House of Lords Offices Committee 3rd report*, HL 84 (1920). Winifred Mary Bird was employed on 1 June 1920, resigned on marriage in 1923, and was replaced permanently by Winifred Mary Jacintha Phipps in 1924. HL Deb 15 Apr 1924 vol 57 c272, and PA, HL/PO/1/549/2.

¹⁵⁸ *House of Lords Offices Committee 2nd report*, HL 96 (1921).

¹⁵⁹ PA, HL/PO/AC/15/43.

¹⁶⁰ Salary records, PA, HL/PO/AC/15.

¹⁶¹ A letter from the Bank of England notes that cheques will be countersigned by Miss Court instead of by Mr Norris, May 1919. PA, HL/PO/AC/15/36

¹⁶² PA, HL/PO/AC/15/46.

responsible one. Outside Parliament, the accountancy function of office work was almost invariably defined as 'men's work'. The demands of Companies Acts, the need to satisfy shareholders, and the use of auditors made accountancy more complex and eventually not just a separate job, but a profession.¹⁶³

At the same time, it would be wrong to suggest that the Lords Accountant's department was modern and professionally run in this period. There is no evidence that any staff there had accountancy qualifications and the Treasury regarded the Lords accounting systems as poor, although previous systems had been worse. There was a major audit of the House of Lords Security Fund and Fee Fund in 1929-30 from which the Treasury discovered a long-running deficit of nearly £6000.¹⁶⁴ The Treasury concluded,

The deficit is due to defalcations by one, or possible two, of the Accountants who held office prior to 1902. Both are now dead... It may confidently be said that no one of the last three Accountants has embezzled funds: each of them in turn ought to have brought past embezzlement to notice, each of them should have suggested improvements in accounting. Miss Court has in fact kept better records than any of her predecessors.¹⁶⁵

By this point, Court not only had the title Accountant but was head of the department, because remarkably, when Norris retired in 1927, after nearly 44 years' service in the House of Lords, he was not replaced by a man. As explained in the House of Lords Offices Committee report:

The Committee also approved of certain re-arrangements of duties which the Clerk of the Parliaments purposed to make... No separate appointment will be made to the post of the retiring officer; his duties will be performed by the existing officers.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ R Guerriero-Wilson, 'Women's work', pp467-8.

¹⁶⁴ The Security Fund, which held deposits by appellants in judicial proceedings as security against costs, had the deficiency. PA, HL/PO/AC/15/11.

¹⁶⁵ The report went on, 'As to disciplinary action the real culprits are dead, and I doubt as regards Miss Court whether more than an expression of displeasure is necessary. She must have lived for some years in dread of disclosure of unhappy incidents of the past of which she had no clear understanding and which she suspected might involve her father's honour.' TNA, T 162/282.

¹⁶⁶ HL Deb 9 Dec 1926 vol 65 cc1484-6.

Women are not mentioned, in fact all personal names are avoided in a way that was not at all usual for Offices Committee reports. Perhaps the Clerk of the Parliaments thought it best that the Lords remained unaware that all 'the existing officers' were women. Under these mysterious re-arrangements, Court became head of department with the title Receiver of Fees and Accountant, at a salary rising by £25 pa to a max of £600 (the same level as Norris). Waterman was promoted to Examiner of Acts, with a salary of £250 pa rising by £15 to £400. Miss W M J Phipps remained as clerical assistant, and a new Junior Clerical Assistant was to be appointed.¹⁶⁷ This new appointee was also a woman.¹⁶⁸

In nine years between Norris's retirement in 1927 and Waterman's resignation on marriage in 1936, no men worked in the Accounting and Copying department. Also, Phipps gained additional responsibilities in 1934, being appointed as Clerk in the Judicial Taxing Office to replace the senior Lords Clerk V M R Goodman, on 20 June 1934.¹⁶⁹ This may have been the first time a woman was given the description 'Clerk' in Parliament, although it was not a separate post but an additional duty. Nevertheless the term 'clerk' was occasionally used to describe the women of the department; a House of Lords Offices Committee report from 1937 refers to the need for lavatories for 'female clerks on the first floor.'¹⁷⁰ On Waterman's resignation,¹⁷¹ Phipps was promoted to become Examiner of Acts, and a man, Percy Johnson, was appointed Assistant Accountant. One wonders what Johnson must have made of being the only man in this department, and reporting to a woman Accountant, Miss Court. Also, in another example of equal pay, Johnson and Phipps were initially employed on the same salary scale.¹⁷² All other appointments were female.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ The salary details and posts are not included in the Officers Committee report, but are set out in the supporting papers. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/456.

¹⁶⁸ Dorothy Courtenay Hood, appointed 1 Jan 1927. Hood resigned in 1930 and was replaced by Alicia Nelly Phipps. HL Deb 30 Jul 1930 vol 78 cc1089-90, and PA, HL/PO/1/549/2. Miss A N Phipps was the sister of Miss W M J Phipps; the 1911 census shows their family living in Basingstoke.

¹⁶⁹ Parliament Office appointment book. PA, HL/PO/1/549/2. No salary is given and this appointment is not mentioned in the House of Lords Offices Report.

¹⁷⁰ PA, HL/PO/CO/1/520. *House of Lords Offices Committee 2nd Report*, HL 56 (1936-37). In the early 20th century the Accounting Office was on the House of Lords first floor west front corridor, in what are now peers' desk rooms 10 and 12. Thanks to Dr Mark Collins for this information.

¹⁷¹ HL Deb 20 May 1936 vol 100 cc1125-6. The Committee sanctioned a marriage gratuity of £498 3s. 0d.

¹⁷² £337 rising by £18 pa to a max of £515, HL Deb 20 May 1936 vol 100 cc1125-6. A year later Johnson's scale was raised from £337 to £350. Phipps's scale was unchanged, but it was confirmed that her entry

The reign of Miss Court ended in 1944. She had worked at the House of Lords for twenty-six years. She had been Accountant since 1919, and head of department since 1927. She was awarded the OBE in 1942.¹⁷⁴ The Offices Committee desired the Clerk of the Parliaments to convey to Miss Court an expression of their deep appreciation of her long and valued service to the House.¹⁷⁵ Court's retirement saw the end of female management of the Accounting and Copying Department; Johnson was promoted and a new man came in as Assistant Accountant. Johnson's salary was established on a scale of £700 to £860, and the Treasury file remarked that the post 'as it present exists had never been held by a man, and we had to fix a man's scale on the recent retirement of Miss Court.'¹⁷⁶ This caused A J Moyes, the House of Commons Accountant, to petition the Treasury for a similar sum – he was being paid on the scale £525 to £850. It should be noted that the women appointed under Court's management all retained their positions and went on to have long careers with the House of Lords after the war.¹⁷⁷

Miss Hannah Frances Mary Court and her family

One final area remains to be explored: how did Miss Court obtain her position in the House of Lords in 1918? She was the daughter of the then Accountant, but the story was not quite as simple as her father giving her a job. Her appointment was a combination of family connection, patronage by the House of Lords, and accident of war. Her family history gives a fascinating glimpse into the culture of employment in the House of Lords in this period.

point should be her existing £367 4s with an increment at £18 on her new scale on promotion - so if Johnson was employed at bottom of scale, she was being paid more than him. *HL Offices Committee 4th Report*, HL 183 (1936-1937), 27 July 1937. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/520.

¹⁷³ In 1939, both Miss Phipps resigned on marriage; W M J Phipps was replaced as Examiner of Acts by Rosalys Joan Griffiths on promotion; two new women, Joan Parnell Culverwell and Rosalind Clara Evernden came in as Clerical Assistants. HL Deb 23 May 1939 vol 113 cc145-6 and HL Deb 21 Sep 1939 vol 114 cc1107-8. Both were paid marriage gratuities and A N Phipps got an additional payment in lieu of promotion. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/534.

¹⁷⁴ *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 11 Jun 1942. She is listed as 'Accountant, House of Lords Offices'.

¹⁷⁵ HL Deb 24 May 1944 vol 131 cc941-2. A pension was authorised.

¹⁷⁶ Letter dated 23 Oct 1944. TNA, T 162/777.

¹⁷⁷ Griffiths, Examiner of Local Acts, MBE, retired in 1964. *HL Offices Committee 2nd report*, HL 129 (1963-1964) and PA, HL/PO/DC/OF/2/5. Evernden, Executive Officer, retired in 1971. *HL Offices Committee 5th Report*, HL 223 (1970-1971). Culverwell, Examiner of Acts, MBE, retired in 1972. *HL Offices Committee 5th report*, HL 168 (1971-1972) and PA, HL/PO/DC/OF/2/6.

The 1881 census shows Thomas Ambrey Court living in Streatham and working as 'Principal, Copying Department, House of Lords'. He lived with his wife, sister, and his three children – Cecil, aged one, and twins Robert Ambrey and Hannah Frances Mary, both three months old.¹⁷⁸ Two of Thomas's sons emigrated to Canada in the early twentieth century; the eldest, Cecil, and the youngest, Edward Crawford Court, born in 1887.¹⁷⁹ Robert, however, started working with his father in the House of Lords in 1899, as Second Assistant Copyist with a salary of £100pa. He continued to live at home and became Second Assistant Examiner of Acts and Copyist in 1903.¹⁸⁰ He married Violet Louise Bolton in 1908, and by 1911 they were living in Twickenham with a one year old son Richard, and his occupation was Clerk, Accountant Dept, House of Lords.

Meanwhile Robert's twin sister Hannah was pursuing traditionally womanly lines of work. In 1901 she was a 'Junior teacher' living at a small Ladies' boarding school in Wandsworth. By 1911 she was working as an Embroideress in 'decorative society needlework'.¹⁸¹ Hannah might have worked indefinitely as an embroideress, while her twin brother continued to make his way up the ranks of the House of Lords Accountancy department.

But the war changed all that. Robert Ambrey Court had four years' Territorial Army service behind him in 1914 and was quick to volunteer to serve. The Commanding Officer nominating him, Lt Col G A Ward, was 'convinced he would make a good officer' and asked for Robert to be posted to his own regiment as Lieutenant,¹⁸² as indeed happened.¹⁸³ He was appointed Temporary Captain in September 1915, and later a Temporary Major commanding a Battalion

¹⁷⁸ His wife was Hannah Mackean Court, nee Walkinshaw; his sister Helen Bligh Court. Cecil was born in 1879. The births of Robert and Hannah were not registered until 1881 so their date of birth is sometimes given as 1881, but their birth certificates show they were born on 13 December 1880.

¹⁷⁹ Cecil and Edward (Ted) migrated to British Columbia.
<<http://genforum.genealogy.com/court/messages/222.html>> accessed 23 Mar 2012.

¹⁸⁰ PA, HL/PO/1/549/2. The 1901 census shows father and son living in Streatham. Thomas also has a new wife, Mary B Court, whom he married in 1898, and a two month old daughter, Phyllis. Mary died in 1906, leaving Thomas a widower for the second time. It is not known what happened to Phyllis.

¹⁸¹ It is not known where she lived; she was a visitor in a house in Chelsea at the time of the census.

¹⁸² His application on 19 Nov 1914 says he had 4 years' service in the Infantry Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company. Robert was clearly keen; since the start of the war he had been drilling with the Old Boy's Corps commanded by Brig Gen Sir G Swayne. TNA, WO 339/14175.

¹⁸³ *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 12 Jan 1915, shows him promoted to temporary lieutenant in the 13th battalion of the Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment) on 1 Dec 1914.

of the West Riding Regiment.¹⁸⁴ He earned the Victory and British War Medals, and the 1914/15 Star.¹⁸⁵ He served at Suvla Bay [Gallipoli] and Egypt.¹⁸⁶

Robert Ambrey Court was killed in action on 26 April 1917, at Hermies, Pas-de-Calais, France.¹⁸⁷ He was 36 years old. His name is inscribed on Parliament's war memorials in the Royal Gallery in the House of Lords and in Westminster Hall. The Offices Committee heard that he was the first from the Lords establishment to fall in the country's service, and a gratuity of £470 was paid to his widow –more than her gratuity from the Army plus the value of his entire estate.¹⁸⁸

One can only speculate as to how desolate his death must have left his widow, his seven year old son, his twin sister, and his 67 year old father Thomas.¹⁸⁹ Thomas had already lost his youngest son to the war: Edward Crawford Court had served with the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion (Saskatchewan Regt) and died at the Somme in October 1916.¹⁹⁰ Thomas must have hoped that Robert would make it through the war, return to work in the House of Lords, and succeed him as House of Lords Accountant. Perhaps the opportunity Robert's death gave to his twin sister might have been some consolation for the family, as just under a year later, she followed in his footsteps by entering the House of Lords Accounts department. It would be

¹⁸⁴ *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 6 Jan 1916, 8 Jan 1916, 8 May 1916, 13 June 1917, 7 Aug 1917.

¹⁸⁵ Medal Rolls, TNA WO 329/2199 p45C, and WO 329 2948 West Yorkshire p36.

¹⁸⁶ HL/PO/CO/1/418 1915 – papers for 4th report, 20 Jan 1915. The list of Lords staff serving in the war includes Mr Court Junior, 'Major, West Riding Regt, Suvla Bay [Gallipoli] and Egypt'. Gallipoli is also on the medal card, TNA, WO/372/5.

¹⁸⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, <<http://www.cwgc.org>>. Robert Ambrey Court was with the 9th Battalion of the Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment), in attendance with the 8th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) with the rank of temporary Captain when he was killed. He was buried in the Hermies British Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais.

¹⁸⁸ The Lords initially paid a gratuity of £270, equivalent to his annual salary. His widow applied for more and was awarded another £200. *HL Offices Committee 3rd and 4th reports* (1917), 14 and 26 June 1917. PA, HL/PO/CO/1/423. By contrast, his service file shows she was paid a total of £172.9.7 from the Army (of which £155 was a gratuity, the rest being promotion pay owed and the £7.11.8 he had on him when he died). His estate was valued at £251.10.9. TNA, WO 339/14175.

¹⁸⁹ Robert's widow remarried in early 1919. Robert's son Richard Ambrey had a daughter called Robin, whose son was also called Richard Ambrey Court. The middle name Ambrey is also perpetuated in the line of the family living in Canada.

¹⁹⁰ Edward died and was buried at Regina Trench on 1 October 1916. Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

too simple to say that she was given her brother's job, but his death had provided a vacancy and therefore an employment opportunity for her. As Virginia Nicholson remarks on women lawyers; 'With a son dead, blind or shell-shocked, the father of a family practice would be grateful to see his clever daughter step into her brother's shoes.'¹⁹¹ Thomas Ambrey Court did not see his son become Accountant, but he did live to see his daughter do so.

Like other early women workers in Parliament and elsewhere, Court owed her opportunity to family connection and wartime expediencies. Her subsequent success, however, was undoubtedly due to her own abilities. She was promoted from typist to Accountant within a year, became head of department within ten years, was given an OBE in 1942, and retired in 1944 after 26 years service. She oversaw a completely female department for nine years and managed a male Assistant Accountant thereafter. Her achievements as a professional woman in the interwar period would be significant in many organisations; in an institution so heavily burdened with tradition and precedent as the House of Lords it is surely remarkable. Along with Winder, Midwinter, Hoath, Dusart and others, her story contributes to a more complex picture of female employment in Parliament than is generally known.

¹⁹¹ Virginia Nicholson, *Singled out: how two million women survived without men after the First World War*, Penguin, 2007), p328.

Conclusion

This thesis is the first in-depth examination of the relationship between Parliament and women in the early twentieth century. It has done this with particular reference to legislation affecting women's lives and gender equality, the contribution of women to Parliamentary standing committees and select committees, and women staff in the House of Commons and House of Lords.

The first four chapters focussed on specific Acts of Parliament; the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 that allowed women to become Members of Parliament; the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 that widened employment opportunities for women; the Equal Guardianship Act 1925 that enabled guardianship of children to be granted equally for men and women; and the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 that gave women the vote on the same terms as men. These four acts provided the opportunity to consider a wide range of subjects, including gender equality, women as MPs, women working in professions, the criminal justice system, rights of mothers and the right to vote.

Some historians have tended to cite the quantity of Acts on women's issues passed in this period as a sign of success for the women's movement, yet judged the impact of the individual Acts harshly. The Sex Disqualification Act has been deemed a disappointment because it was not as radical as the Women's Emancipation Bill; the Equal Guardianship Act was much watered down from earlier drafts; it took ten years before Equal Franchise made it onto the statute book. However, such judgements have not necessarily been made with full consideration of the hard work behind the Parliamentary processes necessarily involved each time, or of actual outcomes. As this thesis has amply demonstrated, the passage of legislation involves negotiation and compromise.

Although the women's movement benefited from female voters exercising influence on MPs after 1918, organisations were dependent on many of the same tactics used during the suffrage battle. They required sympathetic male MPs and peers to act on their behalf in Parliament, and held backroom negotiations with senior civil servants. The role of sympathetic male MPs is a recurring theme in this analysis, and the contribution of individuals has been demonstrated. MPs with legal expertise were crucial in drafting legislation for women's organisations; Colonel Greig and Leslie Burgin, both Liberal MPs and barristers, played important roles in drafting and promoting Equal Guardianship bills for NUSEC. Backbench MPs were very important in asking Parliamentary questions; this was particularly apparent when

applying pressure on the government in the period leading up to Equal Franchise, 1925-1928. They introduced subjects for discussion in Parliament which sometimes led directly to legislation; Herbert Samuel was responsible for the resolution allowing women MPs, an issue on which women's organisations had barely campaigned. And it was necessary for the passage of all Acts that large numbers of sympathetic male MPs attended the House of Commons, spoke in favour and voted. Whatever their motivations, they were all important in a period when there were so few women MPs. The same names repeatedly occur supporting different pieces of legislation – Major Hills, Captain Elliot, Lord Robert Cecil.

It is striking that even where the men are well-known, their historical reputation invariably rests less on their interest in gender equality than on other aspects of their political career. One of the best known names, Lord Robert Cecil, is rightly known for his work with the League of Nations. It was Cecil who introduced the bill which allowed women to become MPs, in the unlikely ministerial position of Assistant-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and was adamant that they should be eligible from age 21. Cecil was also a strong supporter of the Women's Emancipation Bill in 1919, and introduced a private members' bill under the Ten Minute Rule on equal franchise in 1922. Other MPs who played unrecognised significant roles include Samuel Hoare, who attempted amendments to the Sex Disqualification Bill for NUSEC in 1919; Isaac Foot, who introduced an equal franchise bill under the Ten Minute Rule in 1923 and was one of the promoters of equal guardianship who negotiated with the government in 1924; and William Wedgwood Benn, a faithful supporter of all women's causes during the 1920s. But the leading example of an overlooked male MP is Major John Waller Hills, a lawyer and Conservative MP. Today his biographer comments on his marriage to Virginia Woolf's half-sister, and that he was the author of 'one of the finest books on dry fly-fishing ever written.'¹ There is no mention that Hills, who originally opposed women's suffrage but changed his mind during the First World War, became a loyal friend to women's organisations after 1918. He was an extremely important supporter of the Sex Disqualification Act; it was thanks to Hills that the Commons passed equality motions on women and the civil service in the 1920s; and, away from Parliament, Hills chaired the Ministry of Reconstruction's Women's Employment Committee. Violet Markham's testimony about Hills deserves to be better known: 'A fine and disinterested worker, universally liked and respected in Parliament, he became in later years a

¹ E H H Green, 'Hills, John Waller (1867–1938)', *ODNB*. Green describes him as, 'politician and angler.'

champion of the women's cause as of all other movements to secure justice and freedom in the world.¹²

The role of supportive male peers was just as important as that of male MPs, if not more so, as all legislation had to pass both Houses of Parliament and there were no women peers in this period. Important individuals included Lord Askwith, a former industrial arbitrator and civil servant. It was largely thanks to Lord Askwith's work promoting private members' bills and on select committees that equal guardianship made it onto the government agenda in the 1920s. Other significant peers included Lord Kimberley, who sponsored the Women's Emancipation Bill in the House of Lords; Lord Muir Mackenzie, former permanent secretary to the Lord Chancellor, who spoke in strong support of all the women's bills in this period; and the former Liberal minister and later Labour Lord Chancellor, Viscount Haldane. Haldane supported women MPs, opposed proviso (a) of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act and generally stood up for women's causes in the Lords time after time, but like Major Hills, this is not an aspect of his life for which he is at all known.³

Difficulty in drafting bills to give effect to the intentions of women's organisations is particularly apparent. Civil servants were sometimes hostile to such intentions, for example opposing the attempt to remove the marriage bar via the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, but even experienced civil servants sympathetic to an aim, as Sir Claud Schuster came to be towards equal guardianship, could find it very difficult to find wording that would realise what was required. Apparent successes in amending bills sometimes turned out to be in vain because of differing subsequent interpretations. Often women's organisations, and the MPs working on their behalf, thought at the time they had won victories, and only at a later date discovered that these were less significant than hoped. Historians too often fail to take this into consideration, and judge by today's standards rather than what was realistically achievable in this post-war environment.

Party politics had an interesting and at times contradictory effect on Parliamentary legislation in this period. The Labour Party were in opposition during 1918-1922, and they marked their commitment to gender equality by the early introduction of the Women's Emancipation Bill, a good demonstration of Labour support for feminist as well as class-based politics. Virtually all

² Violet Markham, *Return passage. The autobiography of Violet R Markham, C.H.* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1953), p100.

³ There is no mention of any of this in his *ODNB* entry. H C G Matthew, 'Haldane, Richard Burdon, Viscount Haldane (1856–1928)', *ODNB*.

the Labour MPs who spoke in strong support of the bill came from mining backgrounds, and Labour MPs consistently promoted equal franchise bills while in opposition over the next decade. However, when in power, the minority Labour government of 1924 did not prioritise equal franchise; backbench pressure was required to put it on the agenda, and they ran out of time to pass it during their short period in office. The Labour party were strong on the principle of equality, but they had a lengthy agenda once in government and faced an uphill struggle as a minority administration.

The Liberal Party was generally weak and divided during this period, although individual Liberal MPs and peers, such as Isaac Foot, Mrs Wintringham and Viscount Haldane, were very important for equal franchise and equal guardianship. Of the Conservatives, independent-minded MPs such as Major Hills, Captain Elliot and Nancy Astor played at times crucial roles. The unsuccessful Equal Guardianship bill of 1922 was introduced by a Conservative, Lieutenant-Commander Chilcott. And sometimes there were cross party efforts: for example the Conservative Sir Park Goff's Equal Franchise bill of 1920 was formally supported not only by Cecil, Elliot and Astor, but by William Brace, a Labour MP, and by Wedgwood Benn, a Liberal in this period. The support by many MPs from all parties for the Women's Emancipation Bill in 1919 is also notable.

Conservative party policies had the greatest effect on the passage of legislation because they were in power for most of this period, first dominating the Coalition government during 1918-1922, and subsequently governing on their own. Although traditionally seen as more hostile to women's causes than either the Liberals or Labour, it was under the Conservatives that most legislation affecting women was passed, including equal guardianship in 1925 and equal franchise in 1928. This was despite the fact that some ministers, such as Winston Churchill, were unremittingly hostile to women's causes. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Birkenhead, had to overcome obvious personal opposition to propel the Sex Disqualification Act, equal guardianship and equal franchise through the House of Lords. The Conservative party's position on equal franchise is particularly interesting, as the higher echelons of the party greatly feared the effect of equal franchise on their electorate. Ultimately, however, the decision to support equal franchise was principally due to the actions of two men at the top of the party, neither generally known as supporters of women's causes: the personal pledge of Stanley Baldwin as party leader in 1924, and the undertaking by William Joynson-Hicks as Home Secretary in 1925. Were it not for Baldwin and Joynson-Hicks, it is likely that no action

would have been taken during the life of that Conservative government. Few others in the cabinet backed equal franchise.

In terms of Parliamentary procedure, it is noticeable that private members' bills played a large role in the legislation considered here. The Women's Emancipation Bill 1919 is an excellent example of an extremely influential private members' bill which directly led to the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. Without it, women would not have been allowed to practice law, accounting, or join professional bodies, be appointed to the higher ranks of the civil service, sit on juries, or take Oxford University degrees—at least, not as early as they did. In the case of equal guardianship and equal citizenship, a series of private members' bills was important. Among the six unsuccessful private members' bills on equal guardianship during 1920-1924, two were House of Lords bills; the Lords played an important role pressuring the government on this issue. These private members' bills invariably passed at second reading, and the weight of support was such that the government was forced to develop a mechanism for dealing with them - a joint select committee - and the evidence taken by the committee was used to re-draft future bills and eventually to negotiate a compromise between the government and the supporters of equal guardianship.

Even more than equal guardianship, the issue of equal franchise made use of private members' bills as a mechanism for Parliamentary pressure. From the moment the first women voted in the general election of December 1918, equal franchise became a concern for successive governments every year until Baldwin's government finally introduced its own bill in 1928. As Baldwin himself remarked in 1925, he could think of no other subject which had been brought forward so consistently by private members. Between 1919 and 1927 there were no fewer than twelve equal franchise private members' bills, by MPs from all parties. These bills played differing roles on the path to eventual equal franchise. The Women's Emancipation Bill of 1919 established at an early date that the House of Commons was in favour in principle; William Murdoch Adamson's bill of 1924 forced the minority Labour government to consider and later adopt the issue when it would not have done otherwise; and it was during the debate on William Whiteley's bill in 1925 that Joynson-Hicks gave his undertaking.

The difference that Astor and other women MPs made to the legislative process in this period is occasionally demonstrated, although their numbers were small. It is unlikely that the Equal Guardianship Act would have been achieved without championing by Mrs Wintringham over several years, first through her work on the joint select committee, then as promoter of an influential private members' bill. Astor was tireless in her support for all women's causes, and

played a significant role when she manoeuvred Joynson-Hicks into a statement of support for equal franchise in 1925. Dorothy Jewson and Ellen Wilkinson both seconded equal franchise bills in the Commons, and Susan Lawrence was dogged in her persistence in getting an equal franchise bill through a largely hostile standing committee in 1924.

The specific contribution women MPs made to standing committees and select committees was examined in chapters 5 and 6. It was demonstrated that women MPs contributed in a similar way to standing committees as in the House of Commons chamber, but in a rather different way to select committee work. Virtually all women MPs were members of standing committees, but their contributions varied widely through the years. The women most prominent in debate in standing committees were government ministers including Susan Lawrence, the Duchess of Atholl and Ellen Wilkinson, and women with a particular interest in the subject at hand such as Astor on liquor restriction, Rathbone on family maintenance, and Atholl and Horsbrugh on bills affecting Scotland. Women MPs can sometimes be seen acting together, as on the Children and Young Persons Bill 1931-32, and sometimes speaking up on an issue affecting women even when they might not have been expected to, as Atholl did on a number of occasions. But more often they disagreed along party lines, as in the Commons chamber.

The nature of select committee work however, brings to the fore contributions of different women MPs who are less well-known to historians. Although fewer women sat on select committees than standing committees, those who did, such as Mary Pickford on the Indian Constitutional Committee, Ellen Wilkinson on the Kitchen Committee, and Irene Ward and Joan Davidson on the National Expenditure Committee, often made distinctive and worthwhile contributions to a greater extent than most women did on standing committees. Often the women involved had a particular interest in the subject, such as Mavis Tate on equal compensation, and could speak from a wealth of experience and knowledge. Select committee work involved usually small groups of MPs gathering evidence on specific subjects from members of the public, and it may have been the case that this way of working was more suited to some women than the large, confrontational arena of the House of Commons chamber. Evaluation by historians of the contribution of women MPs has previously wholly overlooked this aspect of Parliamentary work. This thesis fills this gap in the historiography and contributes to a more rounded view of the participation of women in Parliament, both collectively and in terms of individual contributions. It takes our historical understanding of the House of Commons beyond the main debating chamber and into a different, more

intimate, sphere of Parliamentary politics. It illuminates a new political role played by women in the aftermath of suffrage, where some women were able to take skills and experience honed by committee work elsewhere and apply it to the work of Parliament.

This thesis also sheds new light on committee work by its in depth investigation of the role of women staff in Parliament. It is not possible to understand fully the work of Irene Ward and Joan Davidson on the National Expenditure Committee without knowing that they were supported by the first woman Clerk in the House of Commons. Kay Midwinter organised and accompanied them on their visits, took notes of the evidence they received, and drafted their reports. They took an interest in her unequal pay, and were responsible for her subsequent move to the Foreign Office.

The information that sixty women lived in the Palace of Westminster in 1901, and sixty-five in 1911, is a new and fascinating contribution to our knowledge of the environment and culture of Parliament. The existence of small groups of women contractors working in the building, such as Post Office telephonists and Ashworths' typing pool, as well as cooking and cleaning, presents a more diverse working environment than is generally understood. The fact that women were employed on a temporary basis as Hansard reporters as early as 1919 has been completely unacknowledged in the history of the Official Report. The effect of the two wars on Parliamentary staffing is also apparent, with 'Girl Messengers' in the Commons during the First World War, and women becoming not only committee Clerks but Press Gallery and permanent Hansard reporters during the Second World War.

The differences between the employment of women in the Commons and the Lords also shed new light on the nature of the Lower and Upper Houses at the time. The House of Lords did not admit women peers in this period, but it regarded its live-in woman Housekeeper highly enough to go to battle with the Treasury over her furniture; it employed a permanent female Accountant and department head on a salary comparable to men; and appointed a female Refreshment manager as a contractor before the Second World War. Meanwhile the House of Commons had a small band of women MPs, but no women staff in any managerial position in this period, and its female cleaners, Hansard reporters and Clerks were employed on terms considerably less favourable than their male counterparts. Any assumption that the Lords was more hostile to women's rights in this period than the Commons should be tempered by this picture of their employment of women.

Beyond the space constraints of this thesis there is scope to examine further Acts of Parliament affecting women's lives and gender in this period, in particular extending back before 1918 and after 1928. The participation of women in standing committee and select committee work could usefully be expanded to the post-1945 period, as could the study of women staff. It would also be interesting to research some of the individual women staff in more detail; certainly the Commons Clerks Kay Midwinter and Monica Felton, and the Lords Accountant Miss Court, would be worthy of biographical studies.

Overall this thesis presents for the first time a detailed study of the relationship between Parliament and women in the early twentieth century. By focussing on hitherto unresearched areas such as committee work and staffing, and tracing the Parliamentary processes of relevant legislation in greater detail than previously, it furthers our understanding of the history of the House of Commons and House of Lords, the impact of female enfranchisement, the employment of women, the effect of the First and Second World Wars, and interwar attitudes to women and to feminist objectives.

END

Appendices

Appendix 1: Members of Parliament (Commons and Lords) referenced in the text, with party affiliation

The following list is of names of MPs and peers who are quoted in, or referred to in, the text. Please note:

- Names are provided in the same form as the members are referred to in Parliamentary Debates. Titles for MPs (e.g. Sir, Captain, Major) are given where the member was usually referred to by that title in Parliamentary Debates. Full names are given with peerage titles to confirm identification. When a member changed name during the course of events in the text (e.g. by peerage creation) both names are provided.
- Party affiliations provided are those when the member features in the text. At times, especially for members of the House of Lords, this is not altogether clear or changes at an uncertain date.

Acland, Sir Francis	Lib
Adamson, Janet 'Jennie'	Lab
Adamson, William (1863-1936)	Lab
Adamson, William Murdoch (1881-1945)	Lab
Addison, Christopher	Lib
Adkins, Ryland	Lib
Agg-Gardner, Sir James	Con
Alexander, Albert	Lab Co-op
Amery, Leo	Con
Ammon, Charles	Lab
Amphill, Lord (Oliver Russell, 2nd Baron)	Con
Applin, Lt-Col Reginald	Con
Apsley, Lady (Violet Bathurst)	Con
Archer-Shee, Lieutenant-Colonel Martin	Con
Askwith, Lord (George Ranken Askwith)	Affiliation unclear
Asquith, Herbert Henry	Lib
Astor, Major Wardorf [later 2nd Viscount Astor]	Con
Astor, Viscountess Nancy	Con
Atholl, Duchess of (Katharine Marjory Stewart-Murray)	Con
Bagley, Captain Edward	Con
Baldwin, Stanley	Con
Balfour, George	Con
Balfour of Burleigh, Lord (Alexander Hugh Bruce, 6th Lord)	Con
Banbury, Sir Frederick [later Lord Banbury of Southam]	Con
Barr, James	Lab
Bartlett, Vernon	Ind
Batey, Joseph	Lab
Beauchamp, Earl (William Lygon, 7th Earl)	Lib
Bellairs, Commander Carlyon	Con
Beckett, Sir (William) Gervase	Con
Benn, William Wedgwood	Lib, Lab from Mar 1927
Bennett, Sir Ernest	Lab, Nat Lab from 1931
Bentham, Ethel	Lab

Bertie of Thame, Viscount (Vere Bertie)	Con
Birkenhead, Lord (F E Smith)	Con
Bonar Law, Andrew	Con
Bondfield, Margaret	Lab
Bonwick, Alfred James	Lib
Boothroyd, Betty	Lab, later Speaker
Bouverie, Edward Pleydell	Con
Boyd-Carpenter, Major Sir Archibald	Con
Brace, William	Lab from 1918 (previously Lib/Lab)
Bradlaugh, Charles	Lib
Briant, Frank	Lib
Bridgeman, William	Con
Brown, James	Lab
Bryce, Lord (James Bryce)	Lib
Buchanan, George	Lab
Buckmaster, Lord (Stanley Owen Buckmaster, 1st Viscount)	Lib
Bull, Sir William James	Con
Burn, Colonel Charles	Con
Burgin, Leslie	Lib, later Nat Lib
Burton, Colonel Henry Walter	Con
Butcher, Sir John	Con
Butler, James Ramsay Montagu	Ind Lib
Buxton, Charles Roden	Lab
Cairns, John	Lab
Campbell, John	Con
Cape, Thomas	Lab
Cave, Viscount (George Cave)	Con
Cavendish-Bentinck, Lord Henrt	Con
Carter, William	Lab
Cazalet (Cazalet-Keir from 1939), Thelma	Con
Cecil, Sir Evelyn	Con
Cecil, Lord Hugh	Con
Cecil, Lord Robert [later Viscount Cecil of Chelwood]	Con, later Ind Con
Chamberlain, Austen	Con
Chamberlain, Neville	Con
Chaplin, Viscount (Henry Chaplin, 1st Viscount)	Con
Chapple, Major William	Lib
Chelmsford, Viscount (Frederic Thesinger, 1st Viscount)	Con, served as First Lord of the Admiralty under Labour in 1924
Chilcott, Lieut-Com Sir Harry	Con
Churchill, Winston	Con
Clarendon, Lord (George Herbert Hyde Villiers, 6th Earl)	Con
Clynes, John Robert	Lab
Cockerill, Brig-Gen Sir George	Con
Colfox, Major Philip	Con
Conway, Sir Martin	Con
Copeland, Ida	Con
Craig, Captain Charles Curtis	Ulster Unionist
Craik, Sir Henry	Con

Cranworth, Lord (Bertram Gurdon, 2nd Baron)	Con
Crawfurd, Major Horace	Lib
Crookshank, Captain Harry	Con
Culverwell, Cyril	Con
Dalton, Hugh	Lab
Dalton, Ruth	Lab
Dalziel, Sir Henry	Lib
Davidson, John Colin Campbell [later 1st Viscount]	Con
Davidson, Viscountess (Joan Davidson)	Con
Davies, Dr Arthur	Con
Davison, William	Con
Dickinson, Willoughby	Lib
Dickson, Thomas	Lab
Dixey, Arthur Carlyne Niven	Con
Dockrell, Maurice	Irish Union Alliance
Dodds, Stephen	Lib
Ede, James Chuter	Lab
Eden, Captain Anthony	Con
Edwards, Hugh	Lib, later Constitutionalist
Elliot, Captain Walter	Con
Ellis, Sir Geoffrey	Con
Emlyn-Jones, John	Lib
Emmott, Lord (Alfred Emmott, 1st Baron)	Lib
Entwhistle, Major Cyril	Lib
Falle, Sir Bertram	Con
Fenby, Thomas Davis	Lib
Finlay, Lord (Robert Bannatyne Finlay, 1st Viscount)	Lib
Fisher, Herbert	Lib
Foot, Isaac	Lib
Ford, Patrick	Con
Fox, Charles James	Whig
Fremantle, Lt-Col Francis	Con
Gainford, Lord (Jack Pease, 1st Baron)	Lib
Ganzoni, Sir (Francis) John	Con
Gardner, James	Lab
Glyn, Sir Ralph	Con
Goff, Sir Park	Con
Graham, William	Lab
Graves, Marjorie	Con
Greenwood, Sir Hamar	Lib
Greig, Colonel	Lib
Grenfell, David	Lab
Gridley, Sir Arnold	Con
Groves, Thomas	Lab
Grundy, Thomas	Lab
Guest, Frederick	Lib
Guinness, Walter	Con
Haden-Guest, Dr Leslie	Lab to Feb 1927
Hailsham, Lord (Douglas Hogg, 1st Viscount)	Con
Hailwood, Augustine	Con
Haldane, Viscount (Richard Burton Haldane)	Lib, later Lab

Hall, Sir Frederick	Con
Hamilton, Mary Agnes	Lab
Hannon, Patrick	Con
Harcourt, Robert	Lib
Hardie, Agnes	Lab
Hardie, Keir	Lab
Harmsworth, Edward C	Con
Harris, Sir Percy	Lib
Hayes, John	Lab
Hazelton, Richard	Irish Nationalist
Headlam, Cuthbert	Con
Hely-Hutchinson, Maurice	Con
Henderson, Arthur	Lab
Henderson, Lt-Col Vivian Leonard	Con
Henry, Sir Charles	Lib
Herbert, Dennis	Con
Hewart, Gordon	Lib
Hills, Major John Waller	Con
Hoare, Samuel	Con
Hobhouse, Sir Charles	Lib
Holt, Richard	Lib
Hope, James	Con
Hope, Lt-Col Sir John	Con
Hopkins, John Wells Wainright	Con
Hore-Belisha, Leslie	Lib (Nat Lib from 1931, Nat Ind from 1942)
Horsbrugh, Florence	Con
Hume-Williams, William Ellis	Con
Hunt, Major Rowland	Lib Unionist to 1917, then National Party, Con from 1918
Hurst, Gerald	Con
Iddesleigh, Earl of (Henry Stafford Northcote, 3rd Earl)	Con
Inskip, Thomas W H	Con
Irwin, Lord (Edward Frederick Lindley Wood) [later Viscount Halifax, then the 1st Earl of Halifax]	Con
Islington, Lord (John Poynder Dickson-Poynder)	Con
Iveagh, Countess of (Gwendolen Guinness)	Con
Jameson, John Gordon	Con
Jesson, Major Thomas	Con
Jewson, Dorothy	Lab
Jones, John Joseph	Lab
Joynson-Hicks, Sir William	Con
Kennedy, Alfred Ravenscroft	Con
Kenworthy, Lt-Com Joseph	Lib to 1926, then Lab
Kimberley, Lord (John Wodehouse, 2nd Earl)	Lab
Kindersley, Major Guy M	Con
Kirkwood, David	Lab
Knight, Jill	Con
Lansbury, George	Lab
Lawrence, Susan	Lab
Lee, Jennie	Lab

Lees-Smith, Hastings	Lab
Leigh, Sir John	Con
Leng-Sturrock, John	Lib
Linfield, Frederick	Lib
Livingstone, Alexander	Lib
Lloyd George, David	Lib
Lloyd George, Megan	Lib
Lloyd-Greame, Major Philip [later Philip Cunliffe-Lister, then Viscount Swinton and 1st Earl of Swinton]	Con
Locker-Lampson, Godfrey	Con
Looker, Herbert	Con
Loseby, Captain Charles E	Coalition National Democratic
Lovat, Lord (Simon Joseph Fraser, 14th Lord Lovat and 3rd Baron Lovat)	Con
Lowther, James	Speaker
Lucas-Tooth, Sir Hugh	Con
Lunn, William	Lab
Lynn, Sir Robert	Ulster Unionist
Lytton, Earl of (Victor Bulwer-Lytton, 2nd Earl)	Con
MacAndrew, Lt Col Charles Glen	Con
MacDonald, Ramsay	Lab
MacDonnell, Lord (Antony Patrick MacDonnell)	Affiliation unclear
Maclean, Donald	Lib
Macquisten, Frederick	Con
MacVeagh, Jeremiah	Irish Nationalist
Magnay, Thomas	Nat Lib
Malmesbury, Earl of (James Harris, 5th Earl)	Con
Manning, Leah	Lab
Markham, Sir Arthur	Lib
Marley, James	Lab
McEntee, Valentine	Lab
McGovern, John	Lab, ILP 1930-1947
Meux, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Hedworth	Conservative
Midleton, Earl of (John Broderick, 1st Earl)	Con
Moles, Thomas	Irish Unionist
Molson, Major John	Con
Mond, Alfred	Lib
Moore, Newton	Con
Morgan, Robert	Con
Morris, Sir Rhys	Ind Lib
Morrison, Robert	Labour Co-operative
Mosley, Cynthia	Lab
Mosley, Oswald	Con to 1922, Ind to 1924, Lab after
Muirhead, Lt-Col Major Anthony	Con
Muir Mackenzie, Lord (Kenneth Augustus Muir Mackenzie)	Lib, later Lab
Murray, Gideon Oliphant-	Con
Murray, Dr John	Lib
Murray, Robert	Lab
Nall, Col Sir Joseph	Con

Naylor, Thomas	Lab
Nesbitt, Robert Chancellor	Con
Newman, Sir Robert	Con
Newton, Lord (Thomas Legh, 2nd Baron)	Con
Noel-Buxton, Lucy	Lab
Northumberland, Duke of (Alan Ian Percy, 8th Duke)	Con
Oman, Sir Charles W	Con
O'Neill, Major Hugh	Ulster Unionist
Onslow, Earl of (Richard Onslow, 5th Earl)	Con
Owen, Major Goronwy	Lib
Palmer, Brigadier-General George	Con
Palmer, Major Godfrey	Lib
Pannell, Charles	Lab
Peel, Viscount (William Peel)	Con
Percy, Lord Eustace	Con
Pethick-Lawrence, Frederick	Lab
Peto, Basil	Con
Philipson, Mabel	Con
Phillips, Dr Marion	Lab
Pickford, Mary	Con
Picton-Turbervill, Edith	Lab
Pitt, William ('the Younger')	Whig
Pollock, Ernest	Con
Pownall, Sir Assheton	Con
Radford, Edmund	Con
Rathbone, Eleanor	Ind
Raikes, Henry Victor	Con
Reading, Lady (Stella Isaacs) [later Baroness Swanborough]	Con
Rees, Sir John David	Con
Rentoul, Sir Gervais	Con
Rhys Davies, John	Labour
Richardson, Philip	Con
Richardson, Robert	Lab
Ridley, George	Lab
Ritson, Joshua	Lab
Roberts, Frederick	Lab
Roberts, George Henry	Coalition Lab to 1922, then Liberal, later Con
Roberts, Samuel	Con
Rothermere, Lord (Harold Harmsworth, 1st Viscount)	Con
Rudkin, Lt Col Charles	Lib
Runciman, Hilda	Lib
Runciman, Walter	Lib, Nat Lib from 1931
Runge, Norah	Con
Russell, Lord John (1st Earl Russell)	Whig
Russell-Wells, Sir Sydney	Con
Salisbury, Marquess of (James Gascoyne-Cecil, 4th Marquess)	Con
Samuel, Herbert	Lib
Samuel, Samuel	Con
Sanders, Colonel Sir Robert	Con

Scott, Leslie	Con
Seddon, James Andrew	National Democratic Party
Selborne, Earl of (William Palmer, 2nd Earl)	Lib
Shaw, Helen	Con
Shaw, Thomas	Lab
Short, Clare	Lab, later Ind
Shortt, Edward	Lib
Silkin, Lewis	Lab
Simon, Sir John	Lib
Simpson, John	Lib
Sinclair, Major Archibald	Lib
Slessor, Henry Herman	Lab
Smith, Reeves	
Smith, Walter Robert	Lab
Snowden, Philip	Lab
Somerville, Sir Annesley	Con
Spens, Patrick	Con
Spoor, Benjamin	Lab
Sprot, Sir Alexander	Con
Stanley, Oliver	Con
Stephen, Campbell	Lab
Stewart, James	Lab
Strickland, Gerald	Con
Summerskill, Edith	Lab
Talbot, Lord Edmund	Con
Tanner, Dr Charles	Irish Nationalist
Tate, Mavis	Con
Taylor, Charles	Con
Taylor, Robert Arthur	Lab
Templeton, William	Con
Terrell, Major Henry	Con
Terrington, Lady (Vera Florence Annie Woodhouse)	Lib
Terrington, Lord (Harold James Selborne Woodhouse, 2nd Baron)	Lib
Thomas, J(ames) H(enry)	Lab
Thomson, Sir Frederick Charles	Con
Thomson, (Walter) Trevelyan	Lib
Thorne, George Rennie	Lib
Thorne, William	Lab
Thurtle, Ernest	Lab
Titchfield, Major Marquess of (William Cavendish-Bentinck)	Con
Tryon, Major George	Con
Turner, Ben	Lab
Ward, Arnold	Con
Ward, Irene	Con
Ward, Lt-Col Lambert	Con
Ward, Sarah	Con
Wardlaw-Milne, Sir John	Con
Watson, Captain John Bertrand	Lib
Wedgwood, Colonel Josiah	Lib, Lab from 1919
Wemyss, Earl of (Hugo Charteris, 11th Earl)	Con

Whitehouse, John Howard	Lib
White, Eirene	Lab
White, (Henry) Graham	Lib
Whiteley, William	Lab
Wilkinson, Ellen	Lab
Williams, Aneurin	Lib
Williams, Commander Charles	Con
Williams, Herbert	Con
Williams, Lieut-Col Penry	Lib
Willink, Henry	Con
Wilson, Sir Charles Henry	Con
Wilson, William Tyson	Lab
Wintringham, Margaret	Lib
Wright [Rathbone to 1941], Beatrice	Con
Wood, Sir Kinglsey	Con
Worthington Evans, Sir Laming	Con
Yeo, Sir Alfred	Lib
Young, Robert	Lab

Sources: *Parliamentary Debates*; *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament* (eds Stenton & Lees); *British Parliamentary Election Results* (ed F W S Craig); *The Complete Peerage*; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Appendix 2: Organisations represented at the deputation to the Lord Chancellor and Bonar Law on proviso (a) of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Bill, 29 July 1919

Federation of University Women, Head Mistresses' Association, NUSEC, National Council of Women, the Civil Service Alliance, the Federation of Women Civil Servants, the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, the National Union of Clerks, the Association of Senior Women Officers in the Ministry of Labour, the Civil Servants Typists' Association, the Association of Temporary Clerks in Government Offices, the Association of Women Sanitary Inspectors and Health Visitors, and the Women's Local Government Society.

Source: Note on the deputation, Parliamentary Archives, BL/98/1/9.

Appendix 3: Organisations supporting the Equal Guardianship Bill in 1921

Association for Social & Moral Hygiene, British Women's Patriotic League, Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, Conservative Women's Reform Association, Federation of Women Civil Servants, National Council of Women, National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare, National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, National Union of Trained Nurses, National Women Citizen's Association, Scottish Christian Social Union, Scottish Mothers' Union, Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations, State Children's Association, The Church Army, Union of Jewish Women, Women's Co-operative Guild, Women's International League, Women's Local Government Society, Women's National Liberal Federation and Young Women's Christian Association.

Source: HC Deb, series 5, vol 141, 6 May 1921 c.1400-1. Colonel Greig.

Appendix 4: Organisations supporting the Equal Guardianship Bill in 1923

Association of Assistant Mistresses, Association of Social & Moral Hygiene, Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, British Commonwealth Union, British Federation of University Women, British Women's Patriotic League, College of Nursing, Committee of Social Progress, Conservative Women's Reform Association, Fabian Women's Group, Federation of Women Civil Servants, Free Church Women's Council, Joint Parliamentary Advisory Council, League of the Church Militant, LCC Women Teachers' Union, London Liberal Council, Mothers' Union, National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, National Federation of Women's Institutes, National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare, National Organisation of Girl's Clubs, National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, National Union of Teachers, National Union of Women Teachers, National Union of Trained Nurses, National Women Citizen's Association, Plumage Bill Group, Professional Union of Trained Nurses, Salvation Army, Scottish Mothers' Union, Six Point Group, Social Institutes Union, Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations, State Children's Association, St. Joan's Social & Political Alliance, The Church Army, Union of Jewish Women, Women's Auxiliary Service, Women's Co-operative Guild, Women's Election Committee, Women's Freedom League, Women's Guild of Empire, Women's International League, Women's Local Government Society, Women's National Committee to Secure the State Purchase of the Liquor Trade, Women's National Liberal Federation, Women's Political & Industrial League, Women Sanitary Inspectors and Health Visitors Association, and Women Village Council's Federation.

Source: *Proceedings of the Joint Committee on the Guardianship of Infants Bill [H.L.]*, *Minutes of Evidence and Appendix*. HL 95 & HL 163, 1924, V, p. 212.

Appendix 5: Deputation on equal franchise from the Equal Rights Political Campaign Committee to the Prime Minister, 8 May 1927.

Introduced by Lady Astor. The speakers were Lady Rhondda (Six Point Group), Eleanor Rathbone (NUSEC), Mrs Hood (Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations), Dr E Knight (WFL), the Hon Mrs Franklin (National Council of Women), Nancy Stewart Parnell (St John's Social & Political Alliance) and Miss E S Froud (National Association of Women Teachers). Also represented at the deputation: Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries (Miss Dorothy Evans), Actresses' Franchise League (Dame May Whitty), British Commonwealth League (Miss Daisy D Solomon); British Federation of University Women (Dr Winifred Cullis); Federation of Women Civil Servants (Miss Ross), League of the Church Militant (Miss L Corben), London Society for Women's Service (Mrs Oliver Strachey), Women's International League (Miss K D Courtney), Women's National Liberal Federation (Mrs Wintringham), Young Suffragists (Miss Dorothy Woodman), British Women's Total Abstinence Union (Lady Horsley), Association of Head and Assistant Mistresses (Miss D R Chetham-Strode), Matron's Council of Great Britain and Ireland (Miss Helen Pearse), Women's Auxiliary Service (Commandant Allan), Women's Election Committee (Mrs Helen Archdale), Women's Cooperative Guild (Mrs Eleanor Barton) and National Women's Citizens Association (Miss Bannister).

It was indicated to the Prime Minister that the following thirty organisations, supported the objects of the deputation:

Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, Association of Higher Grade Women in the Post Office, Civil Service Clerical Association, Civil Service Sorting Assistants, Co-operative Party, Electrical Society for Women, Ethical Union (Women's Group), Fabian Society (Women's Group), Guild of Girl Citizens, Guild of the Citizens of To-morrow, Independent Labour Party, International Woman's Suffrage Alliance, Liverpool Dressmaker's Association, LCC Mistresses' Union, London Teacher's Association, London Young Liberal Federation, Municipal and General Workers Union, National Union of Clerks and Administrative Workers, National Union of Railwaywomen's Guilds, National Union of Teachers, Post Office Women Clerk's Association, Sisterhood Section of the Brotherhood Movement, Theosophical Order of Service, Trades Union Congress, Transport and General Workers' Union, Union of Post Office Workers, Women's Engineering Society, Women's Guild of Empire, Women's Sanitary Inspectors' and Health Visitors' Association, Workers' Union, Young Liberal Federation and Young Women's Christian Association.

Source: *The Times*, 9 May 1927.

Appendix 6: Women witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee on Equal Compensation, 1942-43

Mrs Home Peel and Philippa Strachey (National Council of Women), Mrs L'Estrange Malone and Mary E Sutherland (Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Associations), Mrs V Laughton Mathews (Director of the Women's Royal Naval Service), Chief Controller Jean M Knox (Auxiliary Territorial Service), Air-Commandant Katherine Jane Trefusis Forbes (Director of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force), Anne Loughlin and Florence Hancock (Trades Union Congress), and Caroline Haslett, Miss D M Vaughan and Miss D McClellan (British Federation of Business and Professional Women).

Source: *Select Committee on Equal Compensation: Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index relating to the Report of the Committee*, HC 53, (1942-43)

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Parliamentary Papers: House of Lords committee reports 277

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Secondary sources: books 282

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Secondary sources: articles 290

Secondary sources: unpublished theses 292

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House of Commons:

HC/CL/CH - Clerk of the House

HC/CL/CO - Committee Office

HL/PO/CO/AA - National Expenditure Committee

HC/CL/CO/EA - Kitchen & Refreshment Committee

HC/CL/JO - Journal Office

HC/FA/FO - Fees Office

HC/SA/SJ - Serjeant at Arms

House of Lords:

HL/PO/1 - Parliament Office Papers

HL/PO/AC - Accountants' Office

HL/PO/CO - Committee Office

HL/PO/DC – Domestic Committees

HL/PO/DC/OF - Offices Committee

HL/PO/JO - Journal Office

HL/PO/PB - Private Bill Office

BL - Andrew Bonar Law

DRE - Basil Drennan

GUR – W B Gurney and Sons

LG - David Lloyd George

PRG - Parliamentary Press Gallery

ST - Viscount Stansgate

TNA - The National Archives

CAB - Cabinet

CUST - Board of Customs & Excise

T - Treasury

HO - Home Office

LAB - Ministry of Labour

LCO - Lord Chancellors' Office

LO - Law Officer

MH - Ministry of Health

PRO 30/69 - James Ramsay MacDonald

WO - War Office

WL - Women's Library

2/AMC - Association of Moral & Social Hygiene

2/APC - Association of Women Post Office Clerks

2/JCS - Joint Committee on Women in the Civil Service

2/LSW - London Society for Women's Service

2/NCS - National Society of Women Civil Servants

2/NSE - National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship

2/NWS - National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
 2/WFL - Women's Freedom League
 3/MMI - Suffrage notebook of Mary Mills
 4/NVA - National Vigilance Association
 6/CCS - Council of Women Civil Servants
 7/AMP - A Muriel Pierotti
 7/ELR - Eleanor Rathbone
 7/TBG - Teresa Billington-Greig
 Autograph Letter Collection
 Pamphlet Collection

Bodleian Library, Oxford

MS Eng c.4718 & Ms Eng c.4733 - United Nations Career Records project

CUL - Cambridge University Library

Stanley Baldwin

LSE - London School of Economics Archives

Violet Markham

Hugh Dalton

Student files

LMA - London Metropolitan Archives

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ACC 3613 - National Council of Women

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SC Deb - Standing Committees

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